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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

WOMEN, SPORT AND THE CHALLENGE OF POLITICS:

A CASE STUDY OF THE WOMEN'S SPORTS FOUNDATION UK

BY

BRENDA GRACE

©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the
requirements for the degree of **MASTER OF ARTS**

DEPARTMENT OF **PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT STUDIES**

Edmonton, Alberta
SPRING 1995

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Dr Ann Hall

Dr Trevor Slack

Dr Linda Trimble

Nov. 30/94
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ABSTRACT

This study traced the development of the Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) in Britain over its first eleven years of operation (1984-1994). With the exception of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS), women's sports advocacy organisations are under-researched as a relatively new organisational form. They represent a significant development in the history of women's attempts at gaining greater access to the sportsworld and are an important subject of study as vehicles of change. My interest in researching the British WSF emerged from my experiences as a volunteer with the organisation; this also provided me with insights into organisational issues that warranted exploration. Feminist thinking was central to this project, informing the rationale, methodology and analysis.

After presenting a chronology of the major events in the history of the WSF, issues relating to the following themes were discussed: (1) the connections between the WSF and feminism; (2) the politics of sexuality; and (3) dealing with differences among women. Over the duration of its history the WSF has moved away from philosophical origins influenced by radical feminism towards a closer alliance with the values and priorities of the sports establishment. Although this has enabled the WSF to develop closer relations with the structures of sport, it has also meant that the organisation's agenda has become greatly de-politicised. In effect, the WSF has moved from being a women's sports advocacy organisation to a women's sports development agency. The impact of these changes are discussed in terms of the three themes.

This study argues that making a political analysis of sport is fundamental to challenging gender inequality. Understanding the ideological processes at work in sport enables connections to be made between women's disadvantage in sport and their subordinate position in wider social structures. It is suggested that the WSF's ability to perform its function as the national organisation representing women's interests in sport is closely tied to its ability to link women, sport and politics.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

> An understanding of the history of women in sport, their struggles and resistance, is important to the kind of transformation or social change we envisage today. The problem is that there has been little linkage between the theory and the practice, and minimal analysis about *how* to make women's sport political ... There is potential for change and it lies in the relatively new women's sport organizations that are working to politicize women's sport. (Hall, 1993, p.62)

Established in 1984 to advocate on behalf of British women, the Women's Sport Foundation (WSF) is one of these relatively new women's sport organisations. Similar organisations have emerged in other countries: the USA Women's Sports Foundation founded in 1974; the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) and the Japanese Women's Sports Foundation, both founded in 1981; and Womensport Australia, a coalition of Australian women's sports organisations formed in 1991. The most recent additions to this growing genre of sport organisation are the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation of Malaysia and the Association for African Women in Sport. In some countries, although autonomous women's sports organisations have not been established, women's committees perform an advocacy role within the major government sports agencies. For example, in Norway there is a Women's Committee in the Norwegian Confederation of Sports and in Germany there is a Women in Sport Committee in the German Sports Confederation.[1]

The British WSF was founded by a group of women and one man who shared concerns about gender inequality in sport and who felt that an organisational focus for action was needed to bring about change. With a national scope and a commitment to prioritising the needs and interests of women, this organisation is unique within the British sports delivery system. Almost immediately after it was established the WSF became a women's organisation and adopted the following aim: "to promote the interests of all women in and through sport and to gain equal opportunities and options for women" (WSF, 1984). The decision to create an advocacy organisation was based on the belief that operating from a formal structure would help to give visibility to their campaign within the sports establishment. It was also anticipated that adopting an institutional form would enable the group to engage with the system (the structure of sporting, educational and funding bodies) while still working with and for women as an autonomous organisation.

The emergence of the WSF as a woman-centred initiative addressing gender issues

in sport was an attempt to politicise sport; the organisation declared its intention to challenge discrimination, to define the issues and solutions on women's terms, and to bring about changes that would improve women's lives. From an historical perspective the establishment of the WSF represents a particular milestone in the development of women's sport in Britain. The initiative taken by women to organise on a collective basis in response to the problems they faced in sport generated the possibility for political action in a way that had not existed previously. The efforts of WSF founding members to draw together the traditionally estranged domains of sport and feminism through the creation of an advocacy organisation was unique in Britain. Adopting a feminist approach to improving sport for women held great potential, but as a radical challenge to highly conservative male dominated structures it met with great resistance. The WSF found itself struggling against social and cultural pressures that worked to protect the status quo and reduce the organisation's efforts at achieving change on their own terms. Making women's sport a political issue has been contested terrain, an internal and external struggle that has framed the history of the WSF.

The WSF operates as a voluntary organisation managed by an elected executive committee. The membership comprises individuals and affiliated organisations and has ranged from two hundred to six hundred during the eleven years that the WSF has been in operation. After an early period operating on limited resources generated from membership subscriptions and t-shirt sales, the WSF succeeded in gaining grant-aid from the Sports Council, and more recently support from a commercial sponsor. The organisation has engaged in extensive advocacy and educational work and developed important networks in the sporting world through which women's needs are continually being made visible.

A complex interaction of internal and external events has shaped the course of WSF history. Significant factors in the process of organisational development include the changing membership of the committee (especially the leadership), partnerships created within its organisational environment and the influence of policy and legislative changes that have occurred in the wider social and political context under the Thatcher government of the 1980s. In tracking the growth and development of the WSF over time, a particular trend is discernible. Compared to its origins as a radical woman-centred initiative the organisation today has shifted its emphasis, changed its image and reshaped its agenda.

During the first half of the WSF decade, the organisation was not readily accepted

by the sports establishment that it sought to influence. Its criticisms of institutionalised discrimination against women in sport (mostly public) evoked a defensive response from mainstream sports organisations and the WSF found itself marginalised or ignored by the bodies with which it was attempting to create links. Women within the organisation began to express doubts about the WSF's ability to effect change from the periphery. These concerns, together with the desire to attract external financial support, resulted in a reformulation of strategy, although this did not take place without some resistance within the WSF.

In the second half of the decade, the WSF pursued different tactics which centred around modifying its radical feminist image and aligning the organisational agenda with the priorities of Sports Council. The WSF has covered considerable ground in this direction and now holds a more established position within the structures of sport, demonstrated by its increasing partnerships with traditional sports agencies and the acquisition of funding from the national Sports Council. This, however, has not been achieved without a price. The WSF's move towards the centre from the margins has cost the organisation its political stance.

Why Study Women's Sports Advocacy Organisations?

The growing academic interest in gender within sports sociology during the past twenty years has resulted in a broadening of research topics and an increasingly sophisticated theoretical approach (Birrell, 1988; Hall, 1985, 1988, 1990). A major development during this period has been the emergence of feminist theoretical applications to the sociological study of sport. Within the expanding field of research on women and sport there are still relatively few studies that focus on gender and sport organisations and most of these examine the gendered division of labour within the sports delivery system. British studies in this vein reflect a pattern also evident in other countries, with men occupying the senior decision making positions and women filling service roles at the bottom of organisations (White & Brackenridge, 1985; White, 1988). Noting that most gender research on sport organisations is distributional, Hall, Cullen and Slack (1989) argued that a relational analyses is also needed in order to expose the dynamics that structure gender and relations of power in these organisations.

Research on sports organisations tends to focus on the larger, well resourced and

powerful agencies within the system because these organisations have the most influence over the development of sport. In this respect, distributional and relational analyses of gender within and among the power structures of sport are important to women's challenge of the male control of sport. It is also necessary however, to study alternative organisational forms that have emerged as a result of women's struggle to claim their own spaces in the sports world. While rejection of the traditional male model of sport (hierarchical, formal and rationalised) makes some of this activity hard to locate, the newly formed women's sport advocacy organisations are readily accessed for study, having intentionally sought a public forum.

These women's sport organisations are a subject worthy of research for a number of reasons. From a historical perspective they are interesting, warranting investigation for their emergence at a particular point in time and for the influence they have had upon the course of women's sporting history. As a new development in women's persistent attempts to occupy a place within the male world of sport, these organisations invite examination. They are unusual as organisations in the highly conservative structures of sport because they represent a challenge to this institutional environment, while at the same time trying to become established within it. Women's sport advocacy organisations make a promising subject of study as a different approach to an old problem.

From a feminist perspective, the most important reason for studying women's sport advocacy organisations lies with their potential to create change. In suggesting that these organisations can achieve this, it is important to qualify that 'change' refers not just to making sport more accessible to more women and girls, but to the possibilities for redefining social and cultural meanings and values imbued in sporting practice. In adopting an explicit or implicit political agenda, these organisations become potential catalysts for the transformation of gender relations in sport and *also* within a wider social context. This makes researching them not only a worthwhile academic activity, but a purposeful political endeavour:

> Too few feminists, both in and out of sport have been aware of the ideological power of sport. Sport should be seen as a site not only for producing strong women athletes, but for producing strong, confident, politically aware women. This is the true power of sport in the feminist revolution. (Birrell, 1988, p.49)

Recognising the ideological power of sport is the first important step in making the connections between activism in sport and the struggle against women's oppression in other

areas of social life. Willis (1982) describes the interrelated processes of ideology showing how these work to legitimate a dominant version of social reality. He draws attention to the way that competing accounts of the meaning of social experience are undermined by their tendency to undertake resistance in terms defined by the dominant group. Willis traces these processes in sport and demonstrates how the ideology of natural gender difference is created and perpetuated.

Bryson (1987) and Hargreaves (1986) also discuss the ideological struggle over gender in sport and show the ways in which male superiority is presented as biologically rooted rather than culturally constructed. Sport as a cultural institution upholds naturalised gender difference, ascribing meanings and values in sport which both validate masculine attributes of strength, power and aggression and present feminine characteristics as opposite to these. The media portrayal of sport plays a crucial role in perpetuating 'common sense' cultural beliefs about women's inferiority rooted in their biological difference to men (Birrell & Cole, 1990; Duncan, 1990; Goldlust, 1987; Williams, Lawrence & Rowe, 1986). Identifying sport as a site of cultural resistance to women's oppression places a particular emphasis on the significance of women's sport advocacy organisations. The key to these organisation's potential to effect change is their ability to repossess the terms of the ideological struggle over gender in sport:

> the culturally effective way for sports women (and others) to counter their role as the unwilling victims in a larger legitimation of belief about the nature of sexes is to offer much more strongly their own version of sports reality which undercuts altogether the issues of male supremacy and the standards which measure it. (Willis, 1982, p.44)

Critical analyses of women's sports advocacy organisations have a contribution to make to understanding the successes and failures of women's attempts to redefine sport on their own terms in order to make gains for themselves and to bring about social change.

A Review of Research On Women's Sport Advocacy Organisations

There is a limited amount of academic literature on women's sports advocacy organisations, and the studies that exist focus almost entirely on the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Recreation. The exception to this is Hall's (1994) comparative study of four organisations. Whereas some of the more recently formed agencies are too newly established to have attracted researchers' attention, it is perhaps surprising that the oldest and largest of the women's sport advocacy organisations,

the USA Women's Sports Foundation, has not been the specific focus of a research project to date. There is also no existing research on the British Women's Sports Foundation, although its emergence has been noted as a significant event in several academic papers and books on gender issues in sport. A brief look is taken at how the British WSF has been written about in various analyses of gender and sport, before reviewing the literature that has focussed more specifically on women's sports advocacy organisations.

Deem (1988) reviewed advances made in addressing gender issues in sport during the 1980s and cited the importance of the WSF as the practical component of the growing challenge to the perpetuation of male interests through their control of sport. Talbot (1988a) argued that the emergence of an action group such as the WSF was particularly important in Britain, because this country lacks a tradition of political lobbying to challenge women's inequity in sport. In a discussion of autonomous all-female forms of organisation in sport and leisure formed by women as a reaction to male models, Talbot (1988b) reiterated the importance of the WSF as a group established expressly to change the status quo.

Hargreaves (1989) commented on the establishment of the WSF in her discussion of freedom and constraint for women in sport, drawing on hegemony theory for her analysis. Pointing to the changes occurring in sport as a result of women taking action for themselves, she presents the WSF as an example of women's resistance to men's dominant position within sports structures *and* also in society. In a recently published book addressing critical issues in the history and sociology of women's sports, Hargreaves (1994) engages in a fuller discussion of the WSF. She acknowledges the considerable contribution made by the organisation in keeping women's issues on the sports agenda in Britain, but notes the limitations of the group as an unrepresentative body and its difficulty in acquiring power within the system. Hargreaves makes an important point when she suggests:

> The Women's Sport Foundation has provided an indispensable forum for the empowerment of women in sports. Nevertheless, it needs to go further. To date there are few incentives which are concerned with ways in which wider economic, political and social implications of sports are part of the politics of gender. (p.288)

In turning to literature that has looked in more detail at women's sport advocacy organisations, a comparative study is briefly reviewed, followed by a discussion of some of the case studies that have been undertaken on the Canadian Association for Women in Sport.

Hall's comparative work (1994) examines four women's sport advocacy organisations:

the USA Women's Sports Foundation; the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS); the UK Women's Sports Foundation; and Womensport Australia. Using a model that combines a biographical approach to studying organizational life with a comparative framework for feminist organisations, Hall analyses the history, structure and function of the four organisations. The study examines the connections between each organisation and the larger women's movement of its respective country. It also looks at how these organisations have attempted to establish themselves within mainstream sports structures. Noting that these organisations have attempted to provide an alternative to traditional sport organisations, Hall asks important questions about how far the three more established organisations have been able to sustain political and advocacy functions. The political orientation of these three organisations is discussed in terms of liberal versus radical agendas and the conclusion reached that each of these women's sport advocacy organisations is "liberal to the core" (p.13).

This discussion is central in providing an understanding of the exact nature of the contribution that these organisations are making to sport and the ways in which effective change is restricted by a depoliticisation of the issues surrounding women in sport. Hall highlights how increasing dependency on the state and private sector has curtailed attempts by these organisations to pursue a radical cultural politics. The final comment is a telling one:

> ...women's sport advocacy organisation[s].. have made significant gains in bringing more girls and women into sport, but sport itself remains as male-dominated and male-defined as always. This is not necessarily meaningful progress. (p.40)

The study provides a useful comparison of the four organisations with a considerable amount of descriptive detail and an analysis that raises political questions that are key to the future of both women's sport advocacy and progress for women in sport. Although a much more difficult project to undertake, a useful development would be to build on Hall's study with comparative research that focuses on women's sport advocacy organisations in very different cultures, such as the Japanese WSF, the Association for African Women in Sport, and the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation of Malaysia.

It is interesting that apart from this comparative research, all the detailed studies of women's sport advocacy organisations focus on one organisation, CAAWS. As the subject of academic papers this organisation has been discussed in terms of its feminist activism (Lenskyj, 1991a, Theberge, 1983) and also for its varying position in challenging homophobia

in sport (Lenskyj, 1991b). In a discussion of feminist sport activism during the 1970s and 1980s, Lenskyj concluded that a liberal approach had prevailed and drew attention to the way that the organisation responded to external pressure to operate within the male model of sport (1991a, p.135). Lenskyj points to the contradiction of radical feminists within CAAWS working for change through the legislative process and increased participation, instead of pursuing more radical issues, such as sexual politics. Lenskyj (1991b) also discusses conflict within CAAWS over this particular issue in the broader framework of homophobia in sport. She argues for the use of radical feminist strategies in addition to an educational approach and tactics of lobbying for human rights protection, in the struggle to validate lesbian existence in sport.

CAAWS has been studied fairly extensively by graduate students.[2] Phillips (1990) included CAAWS in her sample of twenty-eight organisations when researching the interactions between feminist organisations in the Canadian women's movement, and the nature of the relationship between the women's movement and the state. She concluded that there were weak ties between most of these women's organisations which shaped their interaction with the state. Lawrence-Harper (1993) studied change in CAAWS as a feminist organisation using a biographical approach. Her analysis of the first ten years of CAAWS history revealed the influence of the founding context in the actions of members during the process of change in subsequent periods. Although I will shortly comment upon weaknesses in the analytical framework developed for this research, combining a biographical approach with constructs that define feminist organisations provides a useful tool for describing how such organisations change over time.

Forbes (1993) examined the relationship of CAAWS to the Canadian government with a particular interest in whether the organisation had been co-opted by the state. After documenting major changes undergone by CAAWS (constrained advocacy, alteration of structure to a more institutionalised form, loss of autonomy and a change of objectives) she surprisingly concludes that this was not the result of co-optation. Her interpretation is based on an analysis of the organisation against a model of co-optation drawn from the political science literature, and centres on her view of CAAWS as a non-existent political challenge to the powerful body (the state). Forbes suggests that as a small and geographically spread organisation, CAAWS:

> ...carries little clout. This is sufficient to dismiss co-optation as an explanation of what has happened to the group. (p.137)

The case studies undertaken on CAAWS to date have approached a feminist organisation from political science and organisational analysis perspectives, and have not drawn upon feminist theory. While the two studies I have examined have been comprehensive in documenting the complexities of CAAWS' development, I have found them lacking in their analysis because of the absence of feminist theory. A weakness of the frameworks used in these two studies is their inability to address ideological issues within their analysis of power and to apply this to the struggles between different groups in the research.

The use of critical or feminist theory would produce a very different answer to the question of the co-optation of CAAWS by the state. For example, the application of hegemony theory in a feminist analysis of sport (Bryson, 1987; Hargreaves, 1989, 1994) would reveal that CAAWS did indeed "pose a threat or challenge to the powerholder, in this instance the government" (Forbes, 1993, p.136). The threat was an ideological one and arose from CAAWS' potential as a radical feminist organisation to challenge the status quo, to uncover institutionalised gender discrimination perpetuated through sport, and to assert a claim for a woman-centred re-definition of sport. In making such a challenge CAAWS threatened not only the institution of sport, but the institution of male privilege which sport upholds.

From a feminist perspective, it is difficult not to position CAAWS as a threat to the largely male controlled state in general and the sport structures in particular, because of its initial attempts to transform sport as a male defined cultural institution. Regardless of the size of CAAWS and perceptions that it lacked the potential to mobilise support in pursuit of its goals, the state had every reason to exert pressure on the organisation to conform to the traditional sporting culture and thereby preserve the position of the dominant group.

Lawrence-Harper documents the internal struggles over lesbian visibility that shaped the process of change within CAAWS, but was limited by her analytical framework from exploring vital ideological connections between these tensions and the powerful social and cultural forces against which CAAWS was struggling. The use of hegemony theory would have helped to make visible the practices through which dominant and subordinate groups (the state/CAAWS, men/women, heterosexual men and women/lesbians) struggle for power

within the social interaction structured by sport. It would also reveal how ideological influences are at work that often result in members of the subordinate group colluding in their own subjugation. Lenskyj's (1991a) analysis of CAAWS' strategic approach to their goals as liberal in orientation cites hegemonic forces at work behind the organisation's inability to commit to a radical agenda.

The shortcomings of not drawing upon feminist theory when building conceptual models to study CAAWS are particularly noticeable *because* CAAWS was a women's sport advocacy organisation founded with an explicitly feminist identity. The literature that has explored issues of power within CAAWS and related these to wider ideological struggles in sport and society (Hall, 1994; Lenskyj, 1991a, 1991b) provide a more useful analysis of the organisation.

A Feminist Cultural Studies Perspective

My analysis of the Women's Sports Foundation draws upon a feminist cultural studies perspective which I believe offers important insights into the organisational issues at stake in a way that does justice to the political dimension of women's sport advocacy.

The case for a feminist cultural studies application to sport is argued by a number of scholars (Dewar, 1991; Hall, 1993; Talbot, 1988a). This perspective conceptualises sport as a cultural institution that shapes social interaction and perpetuates particular values and beliefs. Although sport is shown to be constructed in a way that fortifies the position of a dominant group in society (white males), emphasis is given to how subordinate groups continually resist this through various cultural activities. This approach also highlights the importance of history. A historical analysis of gender issues in sport draws attention to how socially constructed definitions of masculinity and femininity have been given meaning, but have also been contested, within sport (Cahn, 1994; Lenskyj, 1986). Examining how women have used sport as a site of resistance in the past is necessary to inform present day strategies for change.

A cultural studies analysis of sport forefronts the importance of ideological struggle and offers insights into the way that practices in the sports world are significant in reproducing asymmetrical gender relations. The analysis seeks to uncover systems of power and to reveal the role that sport plays in creating and sustaining ideologies of difference and inferiority. It is important to understand how power dynamics operate among different

groups of women in sport, as well as between women and men, and how this works against women's struggle for autonomy. Issues of power are highly pertinent to the Women's Sports Foundation as an organisation that has been established to challenge inequitable gender relations in sport and to gain greater opportunities for all women.

This study is intended to make a contribution to understanding the political significance of women's sport and the potential that women's sport advocacy organisations have to effect change, despite the forces at work to depoliticise their work. Chapter two outlines the methodology of the study, detailing the methods used and the way I attempted to incorporate feminist principles into the research process. In keeping with these principles, a number of issues are discussed that emerge from a critical examination of the research process itself.

Chapters three through six comprise a detailed description of the Women's Sport Foundation over the eleven years that the organisation has been in operation. The WSF's history has been divided into four periods that correspond to particular phases in its development: Founding Period (1984-85); Early Years (1986-88); A Change in Direction (1989-91); and From Sport Advocacy to Sport Development Organisation (1992-94). The growth and development of the WSF are recounted through the main areas of its work and the internal organisational dynamics that shaped this.

The final two chapters of the study deal with organisational issues that were explored through three themes: the relationship between feminism and the WSF; the politics of sexuality; and issues of difference. Chapter seven examines these issues in the context of the WSF's founding philosophy of promoting opportunities for all women in and through sport and analyses their impact on the shift in direction taken by the WSF during its history. In the concluding chapter a number of arguments are put forward in support of a political analysis of gender inequality in sport. The importance of the WSF addressing the three organisational issues identified is discussed with this in mind.

Chapter Two

METHODOLOGY

This case study of the Women's Sport Foundation utilised qualitative methods of semi-structured interviews and document analysis. I conducted tape-recorded interviews in September 1993 with eleven women who had been active within the WSF as a committee member or employee across the range of the WSF history. Second interviews were conducted with four of these women eight months later, after an initial analysis of data had been undertaken. The interviews were based on gathering information about the development of the organisation and discussion of three themes: (1) the relationship of feminism to the WSF; (2) the politics of sexuality; and (3) dealing with differences among women. The selection of qualitative methods was intended to support the research goal of promoting an understanding of the WSF from the position of those within the organisation. Transcriptions of the taped interviews and the collected organisational documents were subject to content analysis. From this process a history of the WSF has been written and the themes analysed.

Feminist thinking is central to the framework of the study, informing the rationale, methodology and analysis. In methodological terms the intention is not to suggest that there is *a* prescribed feminist method which has been followed, but rather that the application of research methods and the research process itself has been informed by feminist values (Bowles and Klein, 1983). Jayaratne and Stewart (1991) identified a number of strategies for the practical implication of a feminist perspective, including approaching research with the intention of contributing to the improvement of women's lives and undertaking a political analysis. Stanley and Wise (1983) draw attention to the need to reflect upon the research process and to examine the emotional dimension of a research project as potential sources of insight.

Exploring Key Themes

In preparing this research I drew upon my experience as a committee member between 1988 and 1992; this had given me a number of ideas about organisational issues that I felt were important and worthy of study. I identified three key themes from these issues.

The first of these centres on the rather ambivalent relationship of the WSF to

feminism. I had observed that women who were serving the organisation with a great deal of energy and commitment to the aim of improving women's lives were clearly reluctant to adopt either the identity, or the discourse, of feminism. A number of executive committee members expressed concerns about the damaging effect on the WSF image of association with the 'dreaded 'F' word'. The organisational anxiety surrounding feminism is an interesting contradiction in view of the WSF description of itself and its aims:

> The Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) was founded in 1984 by a group of women working in sport who were concerned about the discrimination that women faced in sport and recreation...WSF aims to promote the interests of all women in and through sport and to gain equal opportunities and options for all women (Networking For Women's Sport, 1992, p.1)

Not all WSF committee members were reluctant to identify as feminists. At the time I was active in the WSF, the women I worked alongside included liberal and radical feminists. The tensions between these different positions further complicated the organisation's relationship with feminism. I felt that a closer examination of this relationship was important in understanding the WSF philosophy and also in locating the organisation in a wider context. This included establishing the extent of WSF members' involvement in feminist politics and how this had influenced the organisation. I particularly wanted to explore why some women in the WSF perceived the feminist label to be a problem for the organisation when they clearly supported feminist goals, and what processes were at work behind this to keep women divided.

The second theme, the politics of sexuality, is closely connected to the preceding one. I felt that it warranted exploration in its own right, precisely because it is an issue that is generally obscured in other debates, if indeed it is addressed at all. This theme centred on exploring the implications of the gender structure (women-only) of the WSF and organisational anxiety around lesbian visibility. As a WSF member I had been aware that many members were not totally supportive of the fact that the WSF was a women-only organisation. I perceived that this attitude and also the anxiety around the 'feminist' label was actually a fear of being labelled lesbian. The strength of this fear was sufficient to prevent the issues from being addressed by most of the WSF members. This was despite the fact that a number of the women in our midst were known to be lesbians, were welcomed and respected members of the organisation, and were not in themselves construed as dangerous people to be avoided at all costs. Within our committee this irrational fear was not discussed or analysed. As an organisation we did not try and understand why it was so

powerful, and what its implications were for the WSF's aim of reaching out to women from all walks of life. Although it was a sensitive subject I hoped to be able gain an understanding of this issue from different member's perspectives.

The third theme that I felt was significant in the organisation relates to issues of difference. This was characterised by the difficulty the WSF encountered attempting to work towards a common goal for women in sport, while at the same time attempting to maintain a commitment to differences among women. During my volunteer years I was aware that the various executive committees over the years had largely comprised white professional women and that this was a matter of concern to the WSF. Although the work of the organisation reflected its commitment to promoting and valuing the sporting involvement of women of colour, women with disabilities, and women of all ages, we were far from being representative in our organisational structures.

This issue was often clouded by conceptual difficulties; should we assume a similarity about women's inequality in sport so that we may proceed in a united way with our cause? Or should we look at how we are different and what needs to be done about this, at the risk of losing our unified efforts to improve sport for women? We found it difficult to address issues of power among women and the processes at work that privileged some women's needs, while making others invisible. This conflict is not a new one for women joining together to fight against sexism; it has been a particular characteristic of debates in the women's movement during the 1980s (Lovenduski and Randall, 1993). I wanted to try and understand what lay behind the tensions and confusion that surrounded dealing with the differences among women.

Selection of Interviewees

The collection of data was shaped by my previous knowledge of the organisation. I understood how the WSF was structured and also the relationship of the committees to the membership; this gave me a good idea about who would have the most knowledge about the organisation. In identifying appropriate interview subjects, I concentrated on women who had been involved in the active running of the organisation in one or more of the following capacities; committee member, regional or specialist sub-group member, and employee of the organisation. Although some women in the organisation have been part of WSF work outside of these groups there is a fairly clear cut distinction between 'active' committee

members and the 'passive' wider membership.[3] The involvement of the general membership is characterised by their financial support of the work of WSF through their subscription, receiving communication through the newsletter, and having access to the range of services and information that the WSF offers. I wanted to explore the WSF from the perspective of women who had actively shaped its development, and although it would have given me a more comprehensive analysis to have included women from the wider membership, this was not possible within the scope of the study.

Having gained permission from the executive of the Women's Sports Foundation to undertake the research project, I contacted women whom I had identified as prospective interview subjects to ask them for an interview. The response was very positive and supportive; some of the women whom I contacted helped to put me in touch with former members who had not been involved for some time. The women that I interviewed had been involved at various stages of the WSF's development, but the interviews covered the whole organisational lifespan and with sufficient overlap for me to feel that I had different views of respective era. My interviewees ranged across different organisational roles and brought different skills and sporting experiences to the organisation. In compiling the list of women that I wanted to talk to, I endeavoured to identify women with different social and political backgrounds.

From discussions with interviewees about the diversity of women who had been involved with WSF I judged my 'sample' to be fairly representative of the cross-section of women who have served WSF on committees and sub groups. The women I talked to were heterosexual and lesbian, from different class backgrounds, working in the public, private and voluntary sectors, ex-international sports women and women who enjoyed physical activity on a non-competitive basis. All the women I interviewed were in full time work[4] (all had professional connections with sport at the time they joined the WSF), only one was a woman of colour, and only one woman had a physical disability.

Data Collection

I collected my data during two visits to England, the first in September 1993 and the second in May 1994. The interviews took place in interviewee's homes and their work environments. One interview was conducted over the telephone, because there wasn't sufficient time left to meet with the interviewee before flying back to Canada. All the

interviews were recorded on cassette tapes. I listened to each recording within a day of the interview and made notes in preparation for subsequent interviews. This proved to be very useful in the process of refining my data collection, particularly in filling gaps in my knowledge about the WSF's history. Interviews ranged from a minimum of fifty minutes to a maximum of two and a half hours.

The interviews were semi-structured by my interest in the themes outlined, but I also wanted to get at the organisational issues as seen by the interviewees themselves. This was sometimes challenging in trying to let the interviewee guide the discussion, while also trying to explore aspects of the organisational dynamics that related to the key themes. The degree to which interviewees wanted, or were able, to talk about the themes varied, depending on their particular experience and presumably their level of comfort with both the subject and myself. I began each interview by asking WSF members to tell me about their relationship to sport and then to locate themselves within the history of the WSF. Their own 'stories' emerged quite naturally as part of the organisational narrative. I used direct questions to elicit information about particular organisational developments and achievements. This information usefully complimented what I was able to ascertain from the WSF documents I was accumulating. I conducted four follow-up interviews to clarify my understanding of the information that had emerged from the interview transcripts and the collected papers.

In addition to material provided by individual members, I collected a range of organisational literature during a visit to the WSF office: minutes of committees, annual general reports, correspondence, policy documents, and funding applications, as well as promotional material, publications, and press coverage. I photocopied a considerable quantity of internal organisational documents which gave me a nearly complete set of committee minutes and annual general reports for the organisation's eleven years, together with all the main policy documents and a good selection of funded project information.

Data Analysis

Upon returning from the data collection trips, the taped interviews were transcribed verbatim. The organisational documents were sorted into subject headings: minutes of meetings and annual reports; WSF as employer; promotional material; funded projects; the constitution saga, and so on. Within these groups material was filed chronologically, and a series of notes and charts produced in order to map out the organisational activity and

achievements of the WSF over its eleven year history.

My analytic strategy involved subjecting my interview and documentary data to a content or textual analysis. The research texts describe two approaches to this, manifest and latent analysis (Babbie, 1979; Henderson, 1991). The former is concerned with the measurement of significant textual occurrences, useful for example, in analysing surveys, or arriving at quantitative conclusions about data. The second approach, latent analysis, was more suitable for my particular project because of its emphasis on a depth of understanding. My analysis therefore aimed at grasping the meaning of what was being described or recorded, at exploring the underlying subtleties of the text, as well as building up a comprehensive picture of what the organisation had done. This reflected my concern with contributing to understanding about how and why particular issues have evolved rather than just providing a detailed history of organisational events.

A coding process was employed to extract material from both sets of data that related to the three themes with which I approached the research. The process of coding and analysing the data drew on the technological resources of word processing (the transcribed interviews had been done on Word Perfect) and the more primitive 'cut and paste' approach.

Constraints of the Research

The major challenge in this research was endeavouring to study an organisation in one country while effectively living in another. This was possible because of funding made available by my thesis supervisor and also some scholarship support. Attempting to collect data in a couple of short visits to the UK, placed a fairly significant constraint on how much material I was able to gather and also how I was able to develop the research process. It created some interesting logistical manoeuvres in trying to compile a schedule that could accommodate as many interviews as possible with women who were all extremely busy people and located fairly diversely around the country. The brevity of my data collection periods also affected the on site detective work that I was able to do in finding some of the people involved at the very early stages of WSF life. Women within the WSF networks went out of their way to assist me; I became increasingly aware of how much I relied on this as the research proceeded.

Although I amassed a good deal of data, if I had been conducting the research on

home territory I would have been able to collect additional documentation and undertake more interviews. I appreciate that 'more' data does not necessarily imply 'better' research. However, I was very aware when conducting the interviews and collecting papers that I was often forced to make on the spot choices about what to include and what to leave out. My prior knowledge of the organisation in this particular instance was of considerable value.

Constraints and limitations that affect the quality of the research are often discussed together. In this case study, I have chosen to examine the limitations of the research process by drawing on the literature about feminist research methodology to discuss some of the experiences of my own research.

A Feminist Informed Methodology

My interest in undertaking research from a feminist perspective led me to engage with the feminist critiques of traditional research and the emerging debates about feminist epistemology and methodology. Although it has been argued that feminist epistemology and methodology are still in a developmental stage (Harding, 1990; Cook & Fonow, 1991), the debates surrounding them continue to provide useful insights. Stanley & Wise, (1983, 1990) assert the need to address diverse rather unitary theoretical positions in developing feminist theories of how social reality is understood. They also draw attention to the difference between methodology, as the theory and analysis of assumptions informing research, and methods as research techniques. This distinction highlights the fact that research is not value-free or objective, because there are always assumptions shaping the research design - whether these are made visible or not. The influences at work behind my own study emerge in my discussion of a number of methodological issues.

The feminist critique of male bias in the social sciences has drawn attention to the importance of creating knowledge from the perspectives of women (Smith, 1979; Westkott, 1979). This goes beyond merely adding women into the picture and highlights how knowledge created from the perspectives of those who do not occupy dominant social positions provides particular insights into social structures and cultural arrangements. Research that begins from the experiences of women in sport, with a commitment to improving that experience, has the potential to uncover the social processes which construct sport as male territory. Feminism emphasises the importance of linking the personal and the political, and of drawing connections between theory and practice. I endeavoured to

make these connections in my choice of topic and also the way that I proceeded during the research process.

The Choice of Topic and Method

My various experiences as a woman involved in sport, as player, coach, administrator and professional, have instilled in me a commitment to making changes that will improve sport for women and girls. The starting point for my thesis was wanting to make a contribution in this area, which would proceed from studying women's experiences. Behind my decision to step into the world of graduate studies was a need to make theoretical sense of the complexity of the issues I was increasingly facing in my practical relationship with sport. My interest in researching the WSF arose largely from my experiences as a volunteer on the executive committee between the years 1988 and 1992. When I joined the WSF I was inspired by what it was trying to do and felt that working with the organisation would help me comprehend the many contradictions that seemed to surround women's involvement in sport. I learned an enormous amount from other women in the WSF in a whole range of enjoyable, empowering, and sometimes uncomfortable interactions.

While I was gaining much on the personal level, I found that there was a great deal about the organisation that I didn't really understand. My role was to develop a WSF region in the West Midlands and I always felt inadequate in representing an organisation whose aims I related to, but whose politics confused me. My feminist consciousness grew out of my involvement with the WSF and yet ironically, specific political debate was not a feature of our organisational interaction. I began to sense that there were a number of issues rumbling below the surface of WSF which from time to time created particular pressures on the organisation and its membership. The possibility of studying the WSF for my masters thesis represented three particular opportunities. Firstly, it would be research that was located in women's experiences of sport, secondly it would analyze inequitable gender relations in sport through the WSF's work, and thirdly it would be a chance to look at issues within the WSF that seemed apparent and yet hidden at the same time.

A case study was a good way of being able to focus specifically on the WSF while at the same time incorporating a historical and contextual perspective. The choice of semi-structured interview as the primary data collection technique reflected my commitment to trying to understand the WSF from the position of those within the organisation. I saw my

own previous involvement with the WSF as part of this and therefore a help rather than a hinderance. I was prepared to deal with conceptual baggage (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p.51) as part of the research process in an attempt to keep my inside knowledge as a positive contribution to the study. Because I do not endorse positivist theories that frame knowledge about social reality as something that can be separated 'objectively' from those who experience that reality, I chose methods that I felt would not create these artificial boundaries. However I was also aware that the way the research methods were applied was as significant in reducing divisions as the particular methods themselves. This leads to consideration of my research relationship with the members of the WSF.

Insider Status

One of the particular things about this study was that I was known to most of the women I interviewed, albeit not terribly well, as I discovered when doing the interviews. To those who had been involved in the WSF before my time I was a stranger, but one with a great deal of inside knowledge. I generally felt that my insider status was a bonus, the fact that I had been involved in the WSF helped me to be trusted and to be seen as Brenda-who-is-now-a-student, rather than some distant academic who had come to slice up the organisation without having a clue what it was like trying to struggle along in difficult circumstances. Reinharz (1992, p.26) notes the controversy that exists in mainstream and feminist research about the comparative benefit of being known to one's interviewees. Although I felt my insider status was beneficial to my project, as an element of the research process it was undoubtedly the source of more anxiety and greater reflexivity than any other. In this section I want to discuss the relationship between myself as researcher and the women I interviewed, with particular attention to the dynamics of power.

I was committed to the feminist principle of sensitivity to issues of power in the research relationship and tried to find ways of reducing, or at least acknowledging, where I held relative power. I felt the key to this was reciprocity and self-disclosure; I gave continual recognition during the interview that I too had been part of the WSF and was therefore involved in the issues we were discussing. Sometimes I worried that parts of the interview were more like a conversation than an interview. While doing the transcribing quite a bit later, I felt reassured that these moments often contributed greatly to building rapport in the interview and encouraged my interviewee to talk more comfortably about

what were sometimes very personal and difficult issues. Herein lay a problem in itself. As trust was developed during the interview some women shared feelings and thoughts that were obviously painful, and even told me things that had not been spoken about with anyone else. One of the inevitable by products of my self-disclosure to create a more equitable relationship was the divulgence by the interviewee of fairly sensitive information, which made the research subject potentially even more vulnerable.

The control over converting the information I was collecting into research findings gave me a particular form of power as the researcher. Even though all my interviewees were quite aware that they could withdraw from the project at any time and were able to chose what they told me, giving me an interview meant that they had to trust me to treat what ever they said appropriately. The authority dimension of power was actually quite variable. I made a point of locating myself in the same critical plane as my interviewees; after all I was *only* a student doing a research project and had recently been one of the group. I tried to make it clear I didn't see myself as having superior knowledge which authorised me to study the WSF. All I had was greater privilege in being able to continue my education for two years in Canada.

A number of the women that I spoke to I actually saw as being a higher authority than myself, in terms of their life experience/political knowledge/personal achievements. An example of the shifting power dynamics in my researcher/interviewee relationship was my experience of interviewing women who were well established in their academic careers. Here the tables of power were turned completely. I was more than conscious that their co-operative involvement in talking to me was accompanied by a professional scrutiny of what I was doing; *I* was the vulnerable partner in the relationship now. One of the academic women whom I interviewed began the conversation with a casual question, " What is your hypothesis for investigating the WSF?". I was temporarily thrown, having assumed that an established *feminist* academic would, like myself, have rejected positivist research strategies. I nervously gulped out my reasons for approaching the research in the way that I was, wondering how far my loss of credibility was going to detract from the interview, only to be met with a chuckle and, "Thank God for that." I presume I passed the test.

My ethical stance within the project seemed fairly clear in my mind as I set off enthusiastically on my first trip back to England, dictaphone and stock of cassettes packed neatly with my informed consent forms and list of interview contacts. My position became

less clear as the research proceeded and by the time I was bogged down with analysing the data, it began to give me some sharp moments of self-doubt about what I thought I was trying to do. Much of this revolved around how to use my interview material in a way that let the women's voices speak for themselves, while also respecting my promises of confidentiality. Most graduate students have a well founded suspicion that no-one will ever read the product of their academic toil except their committee. I had every intention of providing the WSF and all the women who were good enough to be involved in the project with a copy of the final work, in keeping with my feminist principle of reciprocity. In this sense it was potentially going to be a very public document, and those who looked at it would, at the very least, skim the thing to see if they were obviously visible and if so, how they were portrayed.

My beneficial insider status brought with it the particular pressure of facing the judgement of my work by my peers. I have been continually aware of this while writing up the project in terms of fulfilling my promises of confidentiality, and also in terms of dealing with dealing with different realities.

The management of Different Realities and Understandings of the Researcher

Feminist epistemologies reject the positivist view of the researcher as value-neutral, pointing out that the researcher's particular social and historical location affects what they can know, and how they can know it (Nielsen, 1990; Roberts, 1981; Stanley & Wise, 1983). Part of my responsibility in representing other people's reality in writing up the research involves acknowledging my particular social experience as white, middle-class, and heterosexual. In choosing to address issues of difference and the politics of sexuality in my research, my analysis attempts to deal with the experiences of women of colour, lesbians and women with disabilities. In addition to this, some of the women I interviewed held very different political positions to me. I have to find a way to represent these experiences in my work, whist making it clear I speak not on behalf of these women, but from the point of view of someone with a quite dissimilar background. My 'intellectual autobiography' (Stanley and Wise, 1990), that is the process by which my understandings and conclusions have been reached has been included in reflexivity of the research. I have endeavoured to make it clear that the 'results' of this research are not a representation of the organisation as such, but a construction of the reality of WSF that has been shaped by the researcher.

Reflexivity of the Research Process

Cook and Fonow describe reflexivity as "the tendency of feminists to reflect upon, examine critically, and explore analytically the nature of the research process" (1991, p.2). The importance of reflexivity arises from the feminist assertion that all aspects of the research process are of interest and importance, because they all affect the way that the knowledge produced by the research is constructed. (Bowles & Klein, 1983; Scraton & Flintoff, 1992) This is not simply an argument for 'policing', to check for validity or to weed out inadequate research designs. It might well be perceived that way because this principle originated in anti-positivist challenges to the bias inherent in claims of objectivity and researcher-neutrality. I prefer to see reflexivity as a source of insight as well a means of opening up the research process.

Stanley and Wise (1983) suggest that emotionality is an important aspect of reflexivity for the researcher. My experience suggests that this process begins with the initial contact with the research subjects and rather like an echo, has a delayed reaction that carries its effects on beyond the completion of the project. Even while writing up this thesis, I found myself looking again and again at my reaction to some of the material and events, continually trying to make sense of it all. The interviews were highly personal interchanges and contained moments of great hilarity, but also some bitterness and a measure of sadness. The sheer energy given by women, slogging away to keep the WSF growing over the years was clearly discernible in the interviews, together with evidence of the toll in burn-out that such commitment often takes. I had witnessed this in my own involvement, but was powerfully reminded of the problems by the interview conversations. It was moving to hear the personal histories of women struggling to make changes to improve their own and other women's lives.

I suspect that it is impossible not to have an emotional involvement in interactive research; for me it created a sense of enormous responsibility towards both my research subjects and the WSF, and became the source of growing anxiety as I approached the end of the thesis project. This sense of responsibility goes beyond my rationalised ethical stance of keeping the research subjects informed of what was going on, giving assurances of confidentiality and making it clear that they were able to participate on their own terms. The comment of one WSF member struck a particular chord, "You won't write anything in your thesis that might hurt the organisation will you ?" At the time it was easy to respond

reassuringly, because I saw myself engaged in an undertaking that was intended to be helpful to the WSF. That comment has come back to haunt me on a number of occasions. What did the question (and my reassurance) imply? That I shouldn't make any references to conflict? Surely not. That I shouldn't create a negative overall impression of the WSF? I had assumed that my previous connection and my research interest indicated that I valued the organisation. That I mustn't write about lesbianism, or feminism, in a way that will damage the WSF image by association with these?

As I thought through these problems, I became very aware that what *I* think is useful in the analysis of the organisation, others will find uncomfortable. My intention is not to give any offense, and I hope that I have treated the opinions of all the women who helped me to conduct the research with the respect that they deserve. That is not to say that I share the same perspective or political interpretation of events as everybody I spoke to, and I have endeavoured to address how this has shaped the research. In trying to understand why this caused me so much concern I find myself considering the problematic issue of organising around the category 'woman'.

Within this research project, I found that one of the most difficult things to reconcile emotionally is the great sense of disappointment felt by women drawn together for a common cause only to find that their differences divide them more than their commonalities unite them. By this I do not mean that disagreements, or personality clashes threaten the organisation, although of course every organisation has such ups and downs. I am referring more to differences and commonalities in the sense of women's social and political location. The emotion runs deep when conflict centres on individual's very sense of themselves and their world; their way of relating to others around them. Such conflict is not always dramatic, nor even visible, but the tensions are experienced just as strongly when competing needs or politics are tidied away in the interests of organisational harmony.

The emotion that surrounded my research experience related to these problems. I was moved by women's intense commitment to working collectively towards the goals of WSF, saddened by the experiences recounted that suggested this hadn't always worked, and desperately wondering how I was going to deliver a thesis that addressed the politics of this without alienating anybody within the organisation. One thing is for certain; my relationship with the women I interviewed, and the organisation, has shifted to new ground and cannot return to its previous location. This is too complex a process to understand in favourable or

unfavourable terms. Some of the women in the organisation will be less than comfortable with my political analysis, others will feel disappointed that I didn't go far enough.

Apart from the emotional dimension of the research, continual reflexivity has made me realise how the project has affected my own understanding of the WSF and the issues that affect it. Because I am approaching the research as a feminist project, it isn't particularly surprising that my feminist consciousness has evolved as a consequence. Cook and Fonow discuss the process of consciousness raising that can occur through reflexivity of the research:

> ...consciousness of oppression can lead to a creative insight that is generated by experiencing contradictions...transformation occurs, during which something hidden is revealed about the formerly taken-for-granted aspects of sexual asymmetry. Thus, in this model, previously hidden phenomena which are apprehended as a contradiction can lead to one or more of the following: an emotional catharsis; an academic insight and resulting intellectual product; and increased politicisation and corresponding activism. (1991, p.3)

Reflection of the research process has made me aware of the effects of undertaking the project on my own consciousness. My engagement with a wide range of feminist literature, from the debates about the nature of feminist methodology to the radical feminist critiques of sport, has given me a new position from which to analyze and articulate the issues.

Chapter Three

FOUNDING PERIOD (1984-1985)

In this chapter the origins of the Women's Sport Foundation are examined. First, a look is taken at the context in which the organisation emerged in order to understand why the WSF was created and also some of the influences that shaped its early development. This is followed by setting out the events of the founding period that led to the formal establishment of the WSF.

Founding Context

The background to the establishment of the WSF is considered by looking at three critical aspects of women's sport during the years immediately preceding the formation of the organisation in 1984: (1) the extent of women's participation in sport; (2) the absence of women in the power structures of sport; and (3) the initiatives women were taking for themselves to improve their opportunities in sport.

In the early 1980s the attention of policy makers in sport and leisure was drawn to the great disparity that existed between men and women's involvement in sport and physical activity. Using General Household Survey statistics on the physical activity levels of the nation, Sports Council researchers analysed participation trends and noted the significance of gender within these trends (Sports Council, 1982). The 1983 General Household Survey reported that 54% of men regularly took part in sport, games and physical activities, while only 35% of women were frequent participants. In addition to men's higher rate of involvement, a comparison of male/female participation patterns revealed that men took part in a far greater range of activities than women (cited in Green, Hebron & Woodward, 1987).

This gap between men's and women's participation prompted the Sports Council to take action; women were identified as a target group for increased involvement in the Sports Council's strategic plan, Sport in the Community - The Next Ten Years (Sports Council, 1982). The policy that emerged from this document aimed to increase women's participation in indoor sports from 3.1 million to 4.1 million and in outdoor sports from 4.8 million to 5.7 million between 1982 and 1987.[5] While the impact of the target approach to increasing women's participation is debatable (Hargreaves, 1994, p.241), it nevertheless represented a turning point in sport and leisure policy by putting women on the agenda. In this sense

the Sports Council's document was significant in giving women's issues in sport both visibility and a degree of a legitimacy within the sports establishment at a time when women's needs were generally not considered.

The policy initiative did not, however, address the uneven distribution of power and resources within the sports structures, nor did it tackle the institutionalised barriers that were preventing women from participating in sport. The reluctance of the powerful sporting agencies to confront the underlying causes behind women's peripheral involvement in sport led the WSF founding members to believe that establishing a women's sport advocacy organisation was a strategically important move.

A second issue closely related to women's low participation levels that was key in the perceived need for a national women's sport organisation was the lack of women in decision making positions in sports administration and leisure service provision. This trend was consistent throughout the sports delivery system, in public sector organisations such as the Sports Council and the local authorities, and also in the voluntary sector in governing bodies of sport and umbrella sports organisations such as the Central Council of Physical Recreation (CCPR). The WSF was formed at a time when a traditionally marked gender division of labour existed in sports administration.

White (1988) analysed women's experiences in leisure service management noting both the growth of the profession and the fact that "managerial structures are overwhelmingly masculine, with male attitudes and values" (p.147). Using figures from professional institutions she detailed the extent to which the vertical segregation of responsibility in leisure and recreation organisations located women in lower management or supervisory grades and men in higher administrative or policy-related grades. Her statistical evidence is accompanied by a discussion of the socialisation processes that work against women increasing their power and influence within these organisations. In a study that spanned both voluntary and public sectors, White and Brackenridge (1985) researched the gender composition of key agencies in the British sport delivery system between 1960 and 1985 and concluded that:

> From the analysis of Olympic competitors and officials, executives of voluntary organisations, and professional administrators and coaches, it is clear that the proportion of women with power and influence in British sports organisations is very small, far smaller than the number of women participants would warrant on the basis of proportional representation. Women are under-represented at the administrative, controlling and decision making levels. (1985, p.104)

In the years immediately preceding the founding of the WSF it was becoming apparent that women's influence in the organisation and development of sport was actually decreasing from its already low levels. This was occurring in a number of areas of the sportsworld to varying degrees. Sheila Fletcher (1984) describes how the breaking down of separate spheres in physical education undermined the women's tradition and resulted in a mixed profession dominated by men.[6] In addition to drawing attention to women's marked under-representation, White and Brackenridge (1985) demonstrated that a better gender balance had existed in the sports structures in the 1960s and 1970s than in the 1980s.

The common factor in the loss of women's influence in sport and physical recreation at this time was improved career opportunities. Increasing government intervention into sport from the 1960s onwards had been accompanied by considerable financial support at central and local level. The resulting bureaucratisation and professionalisation of sport together with the expansion of the physical education profession opened up a variety of career opportunities, but women benefitted from these changes less than men. By the 1980s relatively few women held either voluntary or professional positions in the upper strata of sport administration, teaching, coaching and officiating.

Despite the prevailing trend of women's decreasing involvement in the administration of sport, individual women made inroads into what had become the male profession of sport. Although they often faced great pressure as token women, or even outright hostility, their presence was symbolically important. The founding members of the WSF included women who were established academics, sports journalists, a sports photographer and a sports centre manager. All of the four founding members I interviewed spoke of the challenges they faced as women in their respective professions. In an attempt to break down the isolation they experienced many of these women formed loose networks with other women they encountered as they pursued their careers. One of the commonalities upon which these networks were based was a shared concern about women's disadvantaged position in sport. This professional networking paved the way for the establishment of a national organisation to advocate on behalf of all women in sport.

The third significant contextual factor in the pre-history of the WSF relates to the efforts women themselves were making to improve their experience of sport and physical recreation. Although sport in Britain has traditionally been a male cultural institution, there is a long history of women's resistance to their exclusion by men from the arena of physical

activity and recreation (Hargreaves, 1994). It is important to acknowledge that although the creation of a women's sport advocacy organisation was an unprecedented development, women's attempts at negotiating a space within the world of sport on their own terms was not new. In the years immediately preceding the WSF a particularly interesting initiative was taking place that was to have a direct impact on the WSF through one of its founding members. This was the development of publicly funded women-only sports provision as a specific strategy to counteract women's disadvantage in sport. It was not only a significant influence on the early WSF philosophy, but it eventually became a successful tool for making sport more accessible to a variety of women during the 1980s. In the context of the Sports Council's policy of targeting women without addressing the causes behind the problems, activities run by women for women became all the more important.

In effect, the impetus for developing successful strategies to attract women into sport came not from the powerful administrative bodies of sport, but from grass-roots initiatives organised by women themselves. Under the leadership of Vida Pearson, one of the few women centre managers in the country, Charteris Community Sports Centre in the London Borough of Brent pioneered women-only sports and recreation in the early 1980s. With a strong background in feminist activism, Vida worked to ensure that the Borough's commitment to community politics included providing services for women in a way that was relevant to their needs and interests. In 1984 she became a founding member of the WSF.

In the north west of England, the founders of the Liverpool Women & Sport Group took action because they felt that the only way to encourage other women to enjoy the benefits of physical activity was for them to have control over their activities in a women-only environment (South, 1990).[7] These two initiatives were unequivocally feminist in their orientation and proposed radical solutions to the problem of women's low participation in sport. The key to their approach was the emphasis attached to women-only activity, the empowerment of women through their involvement in physical activity and the value attached to enjoyment and mutual support rather than competition. Other woman-centred projects in London that emerged in the early 1980s included a sports project in London that ran women-only activities from an Islington School and a London wide Women's Day of Sport. The investment in new, and often controversial, community projects by Labour controlled local authorities during this period saw the blossoming of many schemes that specifically benefitted women.

Although the idea was a radical one at the time, the success of women-only sessions in reaching the Sports Council's 'target group' could not be ignored and over the years this was to greatly influence the policy of the Sports Council and local authorities. The contribution to women's sport of this pioneer women-only work has been greatly overlooked in the subsequent burgeoning of Sports Council funded projects and local authority initiatives for women that have emerged under the banner of sports development. This in itself is significant. Although the sports establishment has taken on board the idea of women-only sessions, the radical woman-centred initiative appears to have been effectively co-opted by the system in the process.

The WSF emerged against a background of women's unequal involvement in sport at all levels compared to men. Despite the uphill struggle they faced, women were continually seeking to make claims on the male territory of sport and in the early 1980s there were indications that attitudes to women in sport were changing. The recognition given by the Sports Council to the need to address the gap between men and women's participation was indicative of this change. Small pockets of activity organised by women were emerging in an attempt to provide alternative experiences of physical activity that were meaningful and enjoyable to other women, but their lack of visibility meant that their influence on a wider scale was a slow process. When the founding members of the WSF were brought together, their decision to form a national women's sport advocacy organisation was shaped to varying degrees by all of these factors.

Having provided a founding context for the WSF by outlining the general framework of sport for women in Britain, it is appropriate now to narrow the focus and consider the specific sequence of events that led to the establishment of the organisation.

The Influence of the American Women's Sports Foundation

The Women's Sports Foundation began life in 1984 when one man and a group of women who were concerned about gender inequality in sport met together to discuss how a women's advocacy organisation might protect and promote women's interests in sport. Until this group assembled there had not been action on a national scale to tackle the problems British sportswomen faced, although ideas had been exchanged and issues discussed by sportswomen within their informal networks. A group of women working in higher education had tentatively discussed the need for a national body to represent

women's needs in sport, but they had not progressed beyond identifying others who might become involved in such a venture. The catalyst for the founding of the Women's Sports Foundation in Britain was contact with the Women's Sports Foundation in the USA.

Derek Wyatt, an editor with Allen & Unwin publishers, visited the USA WSF headquarters in San Francisco during 1984 while researching a book on women in sport. An ex-international rugby player with an interest in the politics of sport, he was impressed with the American organisation's work to promote sporting opportunities for women. Shortly after his return to the UK he met Anita White, a lecturer at West Sussex Institute of Higher Education (WSIHE), and enthusiastically shared the experiences of his visit to the USA Women's Sports Foundation. Encouraged by the achievements of the American organisation, they decided to bring together interested parties with a view to establishing a British Women's Sports Foundation. In June 1984 the first WSF meeting was held in London.

The founding group included women with international sporting experience as competitors and coaches, and also members whose interest in women and sport linked with their work in higher education, the media, and local authorities. After initial discussions about the need for a collective voice for women in sport, it was agreed that a national organisation should be established with the following aim:

> To promote the interests of all women in and through sport, and to enable equal opportunities and options for women.
> (WSF, Aims and Objectives, 1984)

A list of eleven objectives was drawn up to support the WSF's central aim (see Appendix I).

Interest in their American counterpart continued with a second visit to San Francisco in August, this time by one of the co-chairs Celia Brackenridge, a sports studies lecturer at Sheffield Polytechnic (now Hallam University) who was in the United States for a conference. The USA Women's Sports Foundation was a significant influence in the founding of the British organisation, providing the model of a national advocacy organisation to represent sportswomen and even a name that was imported across the Atlantic. The American influence did not extend beyond this however; the British women agreed from the start that they wished to have a different philosophy underpinning their new organisation:

> ... they will be a good source of information and contact, but they have a different set of interests and culture from us. We are not therefore setting up as a satellite to our sisters across

> the Atlantic, nor should they be led to think we are. R pointed out that they rely on commercial sponsorship, notably from a tobacco company, which should not be the route that we take. (WSF, Executive Committee Minutes, September 1984)

The founding members of the WSF in Britain also made contact with the Women's Sports Foundation in Japan and the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sport (CAAWS), finding the aims of the latter organisation the closest to their own philosophy.

The British WSF operated as an ad-hoc group for a period that extended from the summer of 1984 until their first AGM in October 1985 when the organisation was officially inaugurated. During this extensive foundational stage the members debated organisational philosophy and identified the structural framework through which the WSF would attempt to achieve its aim and objectives. Considerable groundwork was undertaken to publicize the formation of the new women's sport organisation. By its first AGM the WSF was well established and was already pursuing advocacy work in a number of areas.

Conflict Around Organisational Philosophy

Once the WSF's aim and objectives had been finalised, the group worked to develop a constitution and identify strategies to pursue the organisational objectives. Discussions around the philosophy and structure of the WSF were sometimes contentious, the two main issues being the role of men within the organisation and how to address the needs of minority groups of women. Members with feminist convictions argued that the WSF should be a women's organisation that promoted women's interests and autonomy *through* sport, rather than a sports organisation that just sought to involve more women *in* sport. While this was accepted in principle by the group, disagreements developed when the issue of men as members of the WSF arose. After much discussion, it was eventually voted that WSF membership was only open to women, although it was agreed that "non-members could subscribe to publications and make donations or provide help" (WSF, Executive Committee Minutes, November 1984). At this stage Derek Wyatt, the only man to have been involved in the organisation withdrew, although he continued to seek sponsorship on behalf of the WSF for some time.

There was also tension within the organisation around acknowledging the different needs of women in fighting discrimination in sport. Although there was unanimous support for embracing a diversity of women within the WSF network and the organisation's aims

clearly indicated an inclusive philosophy, some members were more able than others to translate this into organisational practice. Debates on how much emphasis should be placed on 'minority' interests without undermining a unified approach to women's problems in sport re-occur in the minutes of the founding period. Members committed to feminist principles attempted to draw attention to issues of power within the group and to keep minority issues on the agenda:

> P reported from the [separate] meeting held to explore the way we as members generally hold positions of power, how we interpret that power, and how we can involve women from a more diverse range of backgrounds in the group who do not traditionally hold such power. There was discussion on the lack of black women in the group, why this was, and how they may be attracted to join.
> (WSF, Executive Committee Minutes, November 1984)

The conflict around organisational philosophy proved too much for some of the women who attended the founding meetings and they dropped out of the WSF. Interviews with founding members reveal that the decision to become a women-only organisation was interpreted by some as an anti-men stance. Women with limited political analysis of the issues sometimes found the visibility of feminists and lesbians within the group threatening. The fear of being associated with a politically radical organisation was also seen as a reason for women withdrawing:

> It was voted you know that WSF was a women's-only organisation and no men will be involved. At that stage poor old Derek was given the heave-ho. And people like [X and Y] left. And one or two others just went, never to come back. We then went into a series of years when WSF was perceived to be radical left wing organisation which is something we've had to fight. I mean I'm not saying we shouldn't have radical views and shouldn't even have socialist views, but you know how defensive people get about groups like that.

The Work of the Ad-hoc WSF Group

Throughout the founding period it was seen as essential to involve as many women as possible in the formation of the WSF. An open door policy was promoted with members encouraged to spread the word and invite other interested women to attend the group. After initial meetings in London, venues were rotated to other parts of England to share the burden of travel and to make the organisation widely accessible. The women involved in the WSF during the early days were mainly London based and they were keen to include women from outside the capital. As the new organisation took shape, it was decided to produce a newsletter containing information about the WSF and developments in the sports world of interest to women. By the end of 1984 newsletter circulation had reached three hundred.

Through Celia Brackenridge's Sheffield Polytechnic contacts a room on the campus was rented at minimal cost to serve as the first WSF headquarters. The Sheffield office provide an important contact point for interested organisations and individuals and a base to store the organisation's growing files of information.

The founding members operated as an informal group with the work load shared according to the skills and time commitment that women were able to offer. Two chairs, a secretary and a sub-group co-ordinator took responsibility for running the organisation. In addition to this function they worked hard to publicize the existence of the new WSF. This included contacting key agencies in the sports establishment, such as the Sports Council, the CCPR and the governing bodies of sport, and also distributing information to local authorities, education groups and the voluntary sector. The reaction of some of the mainstream organisations to the WSF was often cautious, because of its pro-women stance and a political agenda that criticized the status quo. The focus on establishing a network across the spectrum of agencies was crucial to the WSF's advocacy goal. The intention was to co-ordinate information about the struggles and achievements of women in sport and to lobby as a collective voice to facilitate change.

Members joining the ad-hoc group were encouraged to make a contribution to the sub-groups that focussed on specific topics. The cluster groups covered topics such as funding, media, education and sports clubs and met separately to draw up strategies for achieving the WSF goals relevant to their area. The media group set itself the task of "encouraging increased and unbiased coverage of women's sport and promoting the WSF" (Media Working Group Paper, January 1985). This included compiling a register of female sports journalists, providing careers advice for women, producing a WSF calendar featuring all the major women's sports events and developing a public relations service for the WSF. The education group was largely London based and involved women who taught in secondary and higher education institutions. This group aimed to promote awareness of women's sport in their profession and to provide support for teachers and researchers through networking and running seminars on areas of mutual interest. They also wanted to stimulate teacher training institutions to address sexism in physical education, and to encourage research into good practice (Education Cluster Group Paper, February 1985). The sponsorship cluster functioned as a group of individuals who attempted to follow up personal contacts that might lead to financial support for the WSF.

Women from higher education had a strong presence in the WSF ad-hoc group. Margaret Talbot, a lecturer at Carnegie College shared the chair with Celia Brackenridge until May 1985. Other key figures included women working in the media, such as writer Lyn Guest de Swarte who acted as sections co-ordinator and organised the media cluster. Journalist Alison Turnbull worked on sponsorship and a launch for the WSF and Eileen Langsley, a free-lance sports photographer, developed visual resources that the WSF could use. Women from the public sector included Vida Pearson, manager of Charteris Community Sports Centre in London, who acted as treasurer and guided the WSF constitution, and Beverley Hughie from the GLC Women's Unit. More than seventy different women attended WSF meetings during the founding period, some as interested observers and others who played a more active role. It is significant that the majority of those who were involved had a professional as well as a personal interest in women and sport. The WSF benefitted greatly from the professional contacts and networks of its members.

During the founding period the WSF group established membership subscriptions of £ 6.00 for waged individuals and £ 2.00 for unwaged members. Forty women had paid subscriptions by May 1985. Without external funding and with a limited revenue from subscriptions, WSF finances relied largely on t-shirt sales and donations from members. Women who contributed articles or photographs featuring women and sport to magazines often passed on the payment directly to the WSF. Expenditure at the end of 1985 equalled income with the total of £ 825 spent on the production of 20,000 WSF promotional leaflets, WSF t-shirts, and the quarterly newsletter.

Inauguration at the First AGM

The WSF ad-hoc group hoped to launch the new organisation with a publicity event and approached a number of commercial organisations for sponsorship. The intention was to link with the TV Times and promote a sporting challenge event for women that would be the focus of a television documentary. Although the Trustees Savings Bank expressed an interest in the project, the WSF were not able to attract the support that they needed. Rather than delay a public launch any longer, it was decided to organise an annual general meeting in October 1985 to officially inaugurate the WSF. The first Women's Sports Foundation AGM itself was a highly distinctive event, making a memorable impression on

all the members that I interviewed who had attended. As a public occasion that sought to draw many women together (only paid up members voted) it epitomised the WSF philosophy. It has easily been the best supported Annual General Meeting throughout the WSF history, with over a hundred women in attendance. The event was held at the Charteris Community Sports Centre in London and was organised by the WSF member Vida Pearson, the centre manager:

> The organisation of the first AGM was done unequivocally on my part in terms of the fact that if it was going to be in my centre, it would represent the various types of women we are. So I made sure that the major presentation was given by seven different women. There were black women, there were women with physical disabilities, and a mental handicap, older women and younger women. They stood there and gave their own thoughts and feelings about their reasons for being involved in sport. They had already been coming for a number of months, if not years, and they'd felt the need for a political change themselves. They spoke about this in their own terms and experience. That AGM was representational of the organisation and how it was founded.

The day included sports activities and workshops on themes such as class issues and racism in sport, media representation and education, in addition to the Annual General Meeting. The experience of seeing so many different women drawn together by their love of sport was an empowering one for those who attended:

> There was a *very* good feeling at that first meeting, I mean they did a lot of innovative things at that meeting, innovative in that day. I mean first there were women of all abilities, secondly there were a lot of older women there...it was also a meeting with practical work. It really embraced the notion of all women, sport is for *all* women, it's not just for the traditional sportswoman. The philosophy behind the AGM was that sport is for all women. The manager of the centre very much took that line, I would say she was really out in front in terms of her thinking and the kinds of things she was doing. It was held there and so the whole flavour of the inaugural meeting was in that direction.

The draft constitution was presented to the wider membership and lively debate ensued around the issue of group membership. It was suggested that encouraging organisations to join would significantly increase the scope of the WSF. Others argued that this might reduce income from subscriptions if many women joined through one membership. The concern to keep the WSF a women's organisation worked against group memberships being accepted. Members were invited to send their views to the executive who were continuing to review the constitution in order to make progress with charitable status. Those present supported the draft constitution and voted For officers on two committees. The executive committee comprised two co-chairs, two co-secretaries, a treasurer, and a sections co-ordinator to liaise with the various cluster groups. An organising committee was also elected comprising the executive plus members with specialist sub-group or regional

roles.

The elections largely voted women who had played key roles in the ad-hoc committee into official positions onto the new Executive and Organising committees, although a conscious effort was made to maintain a diverse group. To demonstrate its commitment to welcoming women of colour to the WSF, the co-chair positions were filled by a white woman and a black woman. Founding member and ad-hoc committee chair Celia Brackenridge was joined by Janet Smith, a trainee recreation manager in a London borough department. Jenny Thomas, the head of Morley Adult Education College PE department and Sheila Scraton, a sports academic with a PE teaching background, became co-secretaries. Vida Pearson, and Lyn Guest-de Swarte continued their ad-hoc committee roles as treasurer and sections co-ordinator on the new committee.

The function of the organising committee was to create policy and undertake WSF projects, the executive committee was responsible for the day to day running of the WSF. Although operated with great flexibility, the double committee structure was never really established. Falling attendance at meetings over the next three years made it difficult to sustain such a structure and the two committees were increasingly combined.

Summary of the Founding Period

The Women's Sports Foundation was established at a time when women's involvement across the spectrum of sport was unequal with men's, from participation through to administration and policy making. After contact was made with the USA Women's Sports Foundation in the summer of 1984, a small group of sports activists decided that the time was ripe to form a British women's sport advocacy organisation. A series of open-house meetings were held until and May 1985, during which the organisational philosophy and goals were debated. From these discussions the WSF emerged as a woman-centred organisation with a clear advocacy agenda. In May 1985 an ad-hoc committee was formed to prepare for the official inauguration of the WSF at its first Annual General Meeting in October 1985.

Chapter Four

EARLY YEARS (1986-1988)

With an extensive founding period under its belt, the first official WSF committee began its term boosted by the momentum that had been building over the previous year. Although this had often been a turbulent period, the organisation had nevertheless attracted the interest of many supportive individuals and had laid the basis for future networking. This chapter describes the major developments that occurred within the WSF during its first three years of operation. Particular attention is given to the way that the organisation approached its advocacy goals and to a number of internal problems that dogged its progress.

Organisational Objectives

The WSF operated with annual goals as well as more general organisational objectives. The membership at the first AGM agreed the following five objectives for the Women's Sports Foundation for the coming year of 1986:

1. To produce a major funding plan
2. To increase the membership to 1,000
3. To develop regional groups
4. To develop a WSF strategy on race
5. To run awareness courses on sexism in sport

(WSF, AGM Minutes, 1985)

Achieving these annual objectives proved to be harder than was anticipated and they were largely retained over the next three years. Although the WSF was very active developing an advocacy role, it found it difficult to develop an organisational core. The problems associated with this revolved mostly around finance and membership. The funding plan was produced, but efforts at obtaining a major sponsor were not fruitful and limited finances inevitably reduced the scope of the organisation. Some progress was made in this direction when grant-aid was awarded for a London regional office in 1987.

Human resources also proved to be problematic for the WSF. Despite the interest shown in the new organisation during its founding period the WSF struggled to reach its membership target. For example, although the AGM at Charteris had been well attended and was deemed a great success, very few women at the event actually joined the organisation. Chasing up membership renewals was an on-going problem for the WSF and

a major undertaking for a group with scarce resources. Attempts at developing regional groups to foster local WSF activity also made little headway. The committees experienced a high turn over of volunteers and found themselves relying heavily on a hard core of committed women to sustain the activities of the organisation.

The intention of developing a strategy on race reflected commitment to addressing the sporting needs of women of colour, and also a desire to include more women from different ethnic backgrounds in the organisation. The organising committee discussed the need to understand more about black and Asian women's experiences in sport and they resolved to try and recruit more WSF committee members from these groups (WSF, Executive Committee Minutes, January 1986). They agreed that it was important for members to be sensitive to the ways that racism operated within the WSF and that the immediate way forward was to talk with women of colour in order to collect information about the problems they faced in sport. To pursue this, the WSF established links with the Afro-Caribbean Sport Association (ACSA) and individual members with contacts agreed to hold meetings with black women in the London area. Despite these efforts, the WSF found it difficult to involve women of colour on its committees. Janet Smith, the black woman who had served as co-chair during 1986 resigned from her position after a year's term.

The outcome of deliberations about how the WSF could best address racism in sport was a decision to incorporate the issues within the proposed WSF awareness training courses. These were intended for local authority facility managers and sports organisations and aimed to educate providers about the needs of different groups of women and suggest action strategies to reduce the barriers to women's participation. The WSF prioritised the awareness training they were developing, conscious of the fact that this was not being done by any other organisation. It was hoped that the courses would help to generate interest in and support for the WSF.

Much of the energy of the women active on the committees was absorbed by dealing with external events through its advocacy work. The desire to influence the policies of the sports establishment was a driving force behind the WSF focus on an external agenda. Despite being unable to make the progress that it hoped to with its annual objectives between 1986 and 1988, the organisation engaged in quite extensive activity. The vulnerability of its operational base, did not prevent the WSF from making a positive contribution to developments for women in sport. In providing an overview of the growth

of the WSF during this period, three key areas are examined: WSF advocacy work, the London regional office and internal developments.

Advocacy Work

WSF advocacy work included assisting individual sportswomen in fighting discrimination, campaigning for improved media coverage, and responding to legislative changes and policy developments. When cases of discrimination were brought to the attention of the WSF committee they responded by writing to the appropriate sporting body to protest. In addition, efforts were made to attract media coverage for cases wherever possible in order to create pressure for change through public opinion. The WSF newsletter was an important vehicle for sharing information among the membership about discriminatory practices:

> Audrey of Sheffield has been told that she cannot become a member of the angling section of her sports club. Although the club is mixed, the angling section is strictly for men. Why? No reasons have been given except that MEN WOULD BE EMBARRASSED IF A WOMAN SAW THEM PEEING ON THE BANK SIDE!!! Not so funny really, so the WSF is backing Audrey in her fight for membership. Please contact the office if you can offer to support her. (WSF, Newsletter, September 1987)

Featuring case histories in the newsletter was intended to raise awareness about the issues women faced in sport and also to encourage women to see problems of gender discrimination as a collective rather than a personal issue.

The WSF committee campaigned to improve media coverage of sportswomen, although the scope of their efforts was constrained by limited human and financial resources. After a very promising start, the media cluster group petered out by mid-1987, with women finding it difficult to meet on a regular basis. However the aims and objectives established by the group provided a useful framework that enabled progress to be sustained by women on the main committee. An attempt was made to monitor sports coverage that relied upon members sending in newspaper clippings of sexist journalism. The WSF committee responded to these with letters of complaint to the offending sources. Material sent in by members also included sexist advertising and the WSF engaged in longstanding correspondence with the Advertising Standards Agency about the use of scantily clad female bodies to promote various sports products. The WSF hoped to develop this work when it formed a link with the Women's Media Action Group, an organisation that had successfully campaigned to remove sexist advertisements from the London Underground. Unfortunately,

it became increasingly difficult to sustain the WSF media campaign as the contributions of members dwindled.

Conscious of the tremendous influence of television on public attitudes, the WSF committee also worked to raise the awareness of programme editors and producers to sexism in sport as part of their campaign. This entailed writing letters pointing out blatant gender bias in major sporting features, such as the BBC Sports Personality of the Year Award, and also writing to commend good coverage. In 1987 two notable television series featuring women in sport and both were applauded by the WSF. The BBC ran a documentary on sexism in television called "Putting Women in the Picture" and Channel Four screened a series entitled "Women in the Olympics". Members of the WSF committee provided advice to the research team for the latter series and this was acknowledged in the programme credits.

A significant part of WSF advocacy work in its early years was responding to legislative reforms and making submissions to policy initiatives within the sports delivery system. In the period 1986 to 1988 widespread changes were taking place in Britain as a result of policies pursued by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government.[8] The steady dismantling of the welfare state, an emphasis on economic growth at the expense of social policy, and the centralisation of government power away from local authorities, all had extensive and detrimental implications for significant numbers of women (Lovenduski and Randall, 1993). Access to sport and leisure was only one aspect of women's lives that was affected, and for many a marginal one. Major legislative reforms in education and local government took place during this period, namely the Education Reform Act (1986) and the Local Government Act (1988). Elements of the latter legislation posed a direct threat to the tentative gains that women had made in sport and recreation and the WSF responded to these in a number of ways.

Local authorities have played a major role in leisure and recreation in Britain since the considerable expansion of public sector provision during the 1970s. In March 1988, the government announced its intentions to privatise leisure through Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) legislation.[9] The WSF discussed how they should respond to a move that they regarded as a potential threat to the provision of opportunities for many women in sport:

> *Minute 6:* L reported what was known about the impending compulsory competitive tendering process in local government. Essentially, the government want better value for money for services. There were grave implications for the voluntary sector although there was still much confusion about what would happen. The big commercial companies may well leave community recreation alone since it does not yield a profit... C has already written to the Minister (of Sport) to express our concerns about protecting the interests of women. L suggested that we should campaign to get local authorities to make explicit their intentions on community leisure provision.
> *ACTION:* L to draft a standard letter for the newsletter which members can send to their local authorities. C to draft a similar letter for members to send to their MPs.
> (WSF, Executive Committee Minutes, March 1988)

During the year the government showed no signs of modifying its plans to open up public leisure provision to the private sector. Like other organisations concerned about the impact of the legislation, the WSF considered it important to try and influence local councils to cater for the needs of groups in the community who stood to lose the most. Their campaign letters drew attention to the Sports Council 'Sport For All' slogan and the social right of all groups to have access to active recreation. As a small organisation they were well aware that the magnitude of the changes taking place in local government made resistance an uphill struggle, but they nevertheless added their voice to the widespread condemnation of the government's privatisation of leisure. Compulsory Competitive Tendering became law on April 1st 1989.

A small, but highly controversial, piece of legislation went through Parliament in 1988 as an amendment to the 1986 Local Government Act. This legislation effectively represented a direct attack by the Conservative government on the gay and lesbian community in Britain. Section 28 prohibited local authorities from intentionally promoting homosexuality through activities, the publication of materials, or its teaching in maintained schools (Stacey, 1991). The legislation obviously had serious implications for the personal and professional lives of lesbians (including access to sport) and many women within the WSF were deeply anxious to make immediate and strong objections.

However, the WSF was not a unanimously lesbian-positive organisation, making it difficult for them to take a public stand against Clause 28. A number of women within the WSF committee were openly lesbian and the organisation had occasionally promoted lesbian activities and groups in its newsletter, which often drew negative comment.[10] The WSF responded with a gesture, attempting to deal with the issue on an internal rather than a public basis. A statement from a co-chair in the newsletter attempted to raise the issue among the membership. The communication drew attention to the legislation and reminded

members of the WSF aim of promoting the interests of all women in and through sport, appealing to members not to "let outside forces threaten the liberties or diversity of our group." (WSF, Newsletter, January 1988).

The WSF responded to a number of policy initiatives that tackled equal opportunities in this period. In March 1986 the House of Commons Environment Committee enquiry into the Sports Council was published. The WSF had submitted a report to the enquiry that stated:

> Whilst there are clear areas of overlap between our interests and those of the Sports Council, we have specific concern for gender issue which are not yet satisfactorily addressed by the Council. In this sense, perhaps we exist as a consequence of their perceived ineffectiveness in dealing with sexism in sport.
> (WSF, Correspondence, November 1985)

The enquiry was largely concerned with the financial workings of the Sports Council (and the overlap of the Council with the CCPR), but it made the specific recommendation that "the imbalance between men and women in the membership of the Sports Council should be remedied." (House of Commons, 1986, p.v). The WSF were delighted with this and also with the fact that the final report published the WSF submission in full as an appendix. The government's defensive response to the committee's criticism was that "there are few women currently involved in national sports administration and thus a shortage of candidates." (House of Commons, 1986, p.v).

The WSF also made a submission to the 1986 European Economic Community Enquiry into women and sport. They reported the problems facing women in Britain and the recent establishment of the WSF in response to the inequalities women experienced. The Sports Council's consultative policy document Sport in the Community - Which Way Forward? (Sports Council, 1987) also received a comprehensive response from the WSF. The document was intended to serve as the basis of Sport Council policy for the next ten years and the WSF were concerned that the needs of all women were considered within the policy development process. As the government agency responsible for the administration and development of sport in Britain, the Sports Council has a considerable amount of influence, not least because of its power to distribute grant-aid. From its earliest days the WSF had sought to establish a relationship with the Sports Council with the aim of influencing policy as well as attracting financial support for its work.

However, the Sports Council was initially reluctant to acknowledge the WSF and

progress was slow. By 1987, the year that the consultative document was circulated, there were increasing signs that they were taking gender issues seriously. In January, the Sports Council published the following statement on equal opportunities following a review of their grant-aid policy:

> It should be a condition of all grants to mixed sports organisations that the recipient provides equal opportunities for men and women.
> (WSF, Newsletter, Spring 1987)

The WSF wrote to commend the Sports Council on its action and publicised the statement widely to ensure that sportswomen were aware of the implications of the policy decisions for their various governing bodies.

In 1988 the WSF contributed to the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) re-draft of the 1975 Sex-Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts into a singular Equal Treatment Act. The EOC published a set of recommendations based on this proposal that were intended to bring Britain into line with other European Economic Community countries. The WSF supported the abolition of two clauses in the existing Act, the exemption of private clubs from the legislation and the sex-segregation of pupils in school physical education. A WSF member who had been involved in the EOC consultation process explained what happened to the re-draft proposals:

> ..it was supposed to get rid of all the anomalies in the Sex-Discrimination and Equal Pay Act. It was going to retrospectively punish [sports] clubs that were discriminatory. It was going to be wonderful. It sat on the Home Office desk, and it sat there and sat there. Of course we've had fourteen years of Tory rule, you know, we've had a terrible backlash in the eighties. The document is still there and whether anything will happen to it, God knows...I mean if they won't look at conditions of work for employees, they are never going to look at sport and sex-discrimination are they? One or two brave individuals have taken cases against Working Men's Clubs, and you know brought some pressure to bear, but not very successfully, The basic law stands.

Many WSF members working in education were involved in equal opportunities policy initiatives within physical education during the introduction of the national curriculum through the Education Reform Act 1986 and the WSF publicised these through its newsletters. A number of key reports on the debates around sport in school were published at this time: My Favourite Subject (ILEA, 1988) and Sport and Young People - Partnership and Action (School Sport Forum Report, 1988). The WSF committee followed the production of these reports with interest and assisted with the drafting of a statement of equal opportunities in the Sports Council report.

The London Regional Office

Securing major funding for the national development of the organisation was a daunting task for the WSF committee in its early years. After a number of contacts with commercial sponsors were exhausted, it became clear that such organisations did not see the WSF as offering an association that had market value. Aware that few opportunities existed for national funding, the committee also pursued contacts at local level, writing to Local Authority Women's Committees for support and establishing contact with a number of regional Sports Councils. It was through this approach that the WSF eventually made progress, attracting funding for the period April 1987 - March 1989 to develop a London regional office. A £40,000 grant was awarded jointly by the London Borough Grants Scheme and the London and South-East Region of the Sports Council.[11] The aim of the project was to pursue the WSF's aims and objectives in the London area by providing direct services for local women. Two full-time workers were appointed in the spring of 1987. For the first six months the Policy Officer and Field Officer were housed in the offices of the London Strategic Policy Unit and then accommodation became available at the London Women's Centre in Camden.

The project enabled the WSF to develop resources and information for London members and to provide advice on women and sport to various organisations. It was an excellent opportunity for the WSF to pilot some of the schemes they had planned, but not been able to implement because of lack of human and material resources. The awareness training package was the WSF's priority in 1987. The new Policy Officer was given the task of completing the ground work put in so that courses could be run for London agencies, although it was agreed that she would need considerable assistance from the committee to do this work. The WSF staff's initial work programmes centred on setting up an office base and identifying short and long term objectives in four areas: special projects (awareness training work), a computerised membership scheme, creating WSF publicity materials, and developing ideas on securing long term funding. Disseminating information within London about both the WSF and opportunities for women in sport was also an important role of the staff. The WSF was able to increase its interaction among women's groups and sports agencies through these networking activities. A London Steering Committee drawn from members of the organising committee took on the role of co-ordinating and supporting the work of the London workers.

A condition of the grant-aid imposed by the funding bodies was that the project work was limited to the London area. For at least twelve months after the London workers were appointed the WSF retained its Sheffield headquarters, partly to demonstrate the distinction between the areas of work and partly to maintain a WSF presence in the north of England. However, as the new Field Officer and Policy Officer settled into their work, the London office and national organisation became increasingly interconnected and it was agreed that the London base should serve as a single point of contact for the WSF. Sometimes it was difficult to draw a line between what was London work and what was national work and there were occasions when the staff's activities incorporated both. Adopting a pragmatic approach, the WSF committee were happy to blur the edges of the distinction if progress was being made towards improving opportunities for women in sport. It was also in the interests of the London project for the national WSF to be effective and productive and it did not seem inappropriate to the national committee that the London staff contributed to this. Dealing with memberships and developing the newsletter were therefore seen as legitimate London work, even though there was obvious overlap with the national organisation.

With a stretched volunteer base the WSF found it difficult to keep on top of daily administrative work, particularly in terms of membership subscriptions and information enquiries. The London project resources soon included a computer and a programme was set up to deal with new subscriptions and renewals; all WSF membership information was processed in this system. The benefit to the WSF was immediate, membership rose to an all time high in 1987 with 600 individuals and organisations registered. The WSF newsletter became larger and more comprehensive when the workers became involved in its production. A number of organisational operations came to rely increasingly on the London office, with only a small input by volunteer committee members.

This became the source of serious conflict between the WSF and its funding bodies that came to a head at the end of 1988 when a Sports Council audit of the London project was highly critical of the organisation. The criticisms were not limited to the input of London resources into national WSF work. The WSF had experienced problems with managing their workers and poor performance by one of the staff had resulted in work programmes not being completed.

As volunteer organisation, the WSF found it difficult to manage and support full-

time workers. The problems that developed arose from issues that many small voluntary organisations struggle with. An early committee member discussed the WSF's experiences as an employer:

> The organisation has been dogged by all the problems that most women's organisations encounter about commitment and ability to manage. Now I would say that the problem was difficult for the Women's Sports Foundation both ways, from the workers' position and from the management committee's position... That has always been something that has beset women's organisations and I don't know how you overcome it.

The overstretched volunteer base meant that there were times when committee members were unable to put the amount of time they would have liked to into supporting their employees and providing a structured approach for the work of the London office. The particular working environment that the London office workers operated in was not an easy one. As is common with voluntary management committees, the London Steering Committee were a diverse group, with members who had different areas of interest that were all relevant to the project, but no one person had direct expertise that could inform the WSF officers how they should approach their work. The interpersonal dynamics of committee management rather than individual supervision reduced the possibilities for meaningful personal contact in the working environment, and also made effective communication more difficult. It was necessary for the Policy Officer and Field Officer to be highly self-sufficient in developing their roles within the WSF.

It took some time before the frustrations experienced by the workers were understood by the overloaded main committee and it was not immediately obvious that all was not well in the London office. The national committee saw the considerable benefits of the workers' contribution to the newsletter and the membership subscription system, and had confidence that London activities would flourish. They tended to leave the London office and the London Steering group to their own affairs. Matters did not resolve themselves and by the time the workers had been in post nine months, the concerns of the workers and London Steering Group were being articulated to others in the organisation. Following a lengthy discussion at a national committee meeting, renewed efforts were made at the start of 1988 to define clear worker job responsibilities in relation to organisational policy.

For a while it seemed that the cracks that were beginning to show in the WSF employer-staff relationship had been repaired. Unfortunately, the inevitable distance that

exists between a voluntary management group and its employees continued to be a major obstacle. One of the employees became increasingly disenchanted and strayed badly from her responsibilities, a situation that was difficult to detect immediately because of reliance on the workers' independence. The other one, presumably discouraged by having to cope on her own in already difficult circumstances, resigned in August 1988. When she departed, the problems with the remaining worker became extremely visible. Concerned that the organisation had not been giving enough support, the Steering Group and WSF Committee bent over backwards to be fair, but were finally forced to terminate the remaining worker's employment in November.

After such a promising start the problems of the London office were a considerable disappointment to the WSF. As a women's organisation, the WSF had endeavoured to incorporate a feminist process into its internal proceedings; being sensitive to the needs of other women, addressing issues of power and being guided by an ethic of care in handling conflict. Trust was an important principal within the WSF, and many members felt that this had been exploited by the worker who was eventually sacked despite numerous attempts to re-build a positive London office environment. The breakdown in relations between the organisation and its staff was particularly disheartening under the circumstances. And yet at the same time, committee members could see the problems from the workers' point of view:

> The workers came and went. It was always difficult to keep tabs on them. It was difficult to manage the money, it was difficult to manage the work programme. I wasn't ever quite sure how the London Management Group, how regularly they were in touch with these workers. I imagine it must be cripplingly boring sometimes to be on your own all day doing a job. No leadership, no guidance, no social interaction.

At the end of 1988 the two original staff had departed and a newly appointed officer was attempting to pick up the pieces and keep the London office functioning. The WSF committee was facing the criticisms of its funders and desperately trying to make a case for renewed funding beyond the expiry of their grant-aid in March 1989.

Internal Developments

The internal arrangements of the WSF altered slightly during the period as the committee attempted to encourage organisational growth and also to improve its own functions. The WSF re-thought the position on group membership during 1987. The co-

chairs put forward a motion at the AGM that two group membership categories for the organisation be created in order to boost the drive to increase the membership. It was acknowledged that apart from increasing the membership base and contributing financially to the organisation, such a move would enhance WSF networks and give the organisation a greater visibility within the sports delivery system. It was hoped that this direct access to organisations via a membership link would help to raise awareness about gender issues among those who controlled resources in sport. The motion was unanimously approved and the constitution amended to include the following categories and subscriptions:

Waged	£ 8.00
Low/Unwaged	£ 2.50
Voluntary groups	£10.00
Commercial organisations/local authorities)	£35.00

(WSF, AGM Minutes, 1987)

During this year the committee made no further progress with trying to gain charitable status. This was a complicated process that required a constant fine tuning of the constitution and regular consultation with expert advisers. The member who had been working on the this project had relied on number of useful contacts and when she resigned from the committee, no-one else felt able to take the matter on. In addition, a number of issues had arisen that made the committee re-evaluate the benefits of charitable status for the WSF. One of these was a question mark over the inclusion of campaigning as an organisational objective, a potential problem in view of the WSF's advocacy function. It was decided that pursuing charitable status would be put aside until the organisation was better established.

The WSF did not consider altering the double committee structure of Organising and Executive Committees although in practice these met as one group. Attendance at meetings was often not good enough to sustain two separate committees. Committee positions were redefined at the 1988 AGM with the aim of re-distributing the work load of the WSF leadership. The two co-chair positions were replaced by one chair and two vice-chairs. The organisation had effectively been chaired by one member since its inception despite attempts at making the joint co-chair positions workable. It was felt that a single figurehead was appropriate for the organisation, but that this was a demanding position and should be specifically supported by two vice-chairs.

The work of the WSF in 1986 had begun with a great energy built up during the

foundation stage, but by the end of 1988 the organisation was at a low ebb in terms of its human resources. The wider membership had fluctuated greatly during the period[12] and the number of women playing active roles within the WSF had consistently diminished. This placed a great deal of strain on committee members at a time when the organisation was actually expanding its work and taking on additional commitments such as the London regional office. The period was characterised by considerable uncertainty created by changing political events which impacted not only on the WSF as an organisation, but on the personal and professional lives of the women who were holding it together. There was a high turn-over of volunteers with many women dropping out because of work related stress and others experiencing burn-out from attempting to do too much within the WSF. At the 1987 AGM the co-chair informed the meeting:

> Whilst in some ways our future prospects look good, we are also facing an organisational crisis - we simply haven't got enough women coming forward to serve actively on our committees'. (WSF, AGM Minutes - Chair's Report, 1987)

Despite the plea made for more women to become involved in the committee, a hard-core continued to bear the work load under increasing strain. In 1988 the organisation had lost both its co-chairs before the October AGM. Anita Cacchioli resigned in May because of the demands of her changing work environment and Celia Brackenridge was suddenly rendered out of action in the summer by a serious back problems. She wrote her address to the meeting from a hospital bed. Changes in personnel was a highly significant factor in the shift of direction that the WSF underwent after 1988, although this was a gradual process that began with the departure of influential radical feminists during the early WSF years. The drift in the WSF's political orientation towards a more liberal feminist approach was consolidated with the change of chair at the end of 1988.

Summary of the WSF Early Years

Between 1986 and 1988 the WSF expanded its activities considerably. The organisation pursued an energetic advocacy agenda that included taking up cases of individual women who experienced discrimination in sport, campaigning for improved media coverage of women in sport, and lobbying government and sports organisations to make policy changes. The receipt of funding from the London Borough Grants Scheme and the regional Sports Council in 1987 to establish a London regional office was a major boost for the organisation. One of the problems for the WSF during this period was the decreasing

support of its membership base and the intense pressure that was placed on the women playing an active role on the committees. The demands of the WSF external agenda generated new areas of activity at a time when the organisation was experiencing difficulty developing its core.

Although there were some gains made for women during these three years in the area of sports policy, on the whole, events in the wider political and economic environment under Thatcher's government created a climate of great uncertainty and impacted negatively on the WSF. Having begun this period on a high note, committee members found themselves increasingly worn down by the sports community's resistance to their attempts at establishing links, and more significantly by a series of internal problems.

Chapter Five

A CHANGE IN DIRECTION (1989-1991)

The next three years of WSF history represented the beginnings of a quite different approach to achieving the aims and objectives of the organisation. Under new leadership and with an influx of new women onto the committee, fresh ideas and different priorities emerged. The WSF began to focus on ways of co-operating more closely with the system it had previously been highly critical of and directly sought opportunities of becoming mainstreamed.

A New Lease of Life

The chair elected at the AGM in October 1988 was Anita White, the founding member who had set up the very first WSF meeting with Derek Wyatt in 1984. Although a member from the beginning, she had not been active on the committee since 1985. Like Celia Brackenridge, Anita White was an established academic and an ex-international sportswoman. She was also a Minister's nominee on the South-East Regional Sports Council and was widely known and respected within the sports community. Anita's credibility in the sports world was viewed by the women who approached her to stand for office as having great potential benefit for the WSF and also a strength in following Celia Brackenridge's charismatic and energetic leadership.

The 1988 AGM was held in the London Women's Centre where the WSF had been housed for a year and was a well attended event. With new members drawn from the AGM and a series of co-options following immediately afterwards, the 1989 WSF Executive and Organising Committees began the year with an unusually full compliment of officers, some of whom had previously been active on the committee. Rosie Mayglothling, a national coach working as a development officer for the Amateur Rowing Association, and Rohney Malik, a London sports development officer were elected as vice-chairs. Rohney was a newcomer to the WSF Executive and as a woman of Asian origin, was the only woman of colour on the WSF committee since 1986. The two secretary jobs were held by long term committee members Jenny Thomas and Enid Grimshaw. Louise Jacklin, a policy office with the London Strategic Policy Unit served as sections co-ordinator for the second year running.

The Organising Committee attracted new representatives for five WSF regions: Wales, London, South, South-East and West Midlands, and for three working groups; Press

and Publicity, Education and Research and Sponsorship. The WSF cluster groups which had not been active since 1987 were effectively revived. The 1989 committees were an interesting mixture of continuing members, founding members returning to WSF committee work after a few years absence and completely new, younger women eager to learn about the issues.[13] After the problems of the previous two years, re-building a strong committee became a key theme of 1989. Concern about burn-out led to a careful re-assessment of strategies to achieve the WSF annual objectives together with a commitment to sharing out responsibilities more widely among the committee.

The early meetings of this period included much discussion around the structuring of the committee work load and the development of effective communication channels. The activities of the WSF had developed into a complex set of projects conducted by groups and individuals acting on behalf of the organisation who reported back to the main committee on progress. The London worker was responsible to a Steering Committee (most of whom held positions on the main committee), but also attended national meetings where her work was discussed. New members joining the committees had often found it difficult to comprehend the details of WSF activity, unless their particular professional location gave them a background that illuminated the issue under discussion. This also made it difficult for new women to have clear ideas about how they might make a contribution to the organisation. Aware of this and determined to consolidate the foundations of the 1989 committee, the chair placed a great deal of emphasis on the working process and endeavoured to practice inclusive leadership.

The annual objectives for 1989 largely echoed the priorities of previous years, although a new goal was added in response to a perceived need to make the now established WSF more visible in the world of sport:

1. To enhance the profile of the WSF
2. To develop further direct services
3. To increase the membership
4. To establish funding for the office post-March 1989
5. To develop regional activity

(WSF, AGM Minutes, 1988)

The new lease of life experienced at the start of 1989 gave the WSF a more sound organisational core from which to continue the WSF agenda. Although described as a point of significant change in the organisation's history, there was also a good degree of continuity from the preceding period; most of the committee had served previously and the annual

objectives were fundamentally the same. It was the strategic approach to achieving these and the more general organisational objectives that marks the change of direction taken by the WSF over its second five years of operation.

Improving the Image of WSF

The move to enhance the profile of the WSF was motivated by the concern of a number of members that the organisation was limited in its effectiveness while it remained outside the mainstream sports system. This translated as changing the way the organisation was seen by others as much as increasing its actual visibility. Changing the image of the WSF also reflected the belief of many of the women on the committee that the early association of the WSF with radical feminism (and by association lesbianism) had alienated the organisation both from potential members and from the agencies it wished to influence. Although it had been set up as a women-only organisation, the WSF was not separatist and had attempted to establish links with the 'system', but these attempts had generally been treated with suspicion by mainstream organisations. The creation of the WSF represented a challenge to the status quo and by drawing public attention to the inequalities prevalent within the sports structures its advocacy work had often embarrassed the establishment. Not surprisingly, the reaction of the highly conservative male-controlled institutions of sport to the WSF was less than friendly. The efforts by the early committee to establish a dialogue with the Sports Council were hard work:

> I tried several times to get a meeting and I was, you know, I was frozen out basically, given a cold shoulder by them. Anything with the word 'women' would immediately cause alarm bells to ring, because 'women' must equal 'lesbian' - Oh my god! Absolutely homophobic reaction. And the other thing was that by existing we were criticising their work. Just by existing. We couldn't even get a meeting. I think I got one eventually, very late on in my time.

In fact the WSF's first Sports Council partnership was the London project work part-funded by the London and South-East Sports Council and the LBGU. The lack of a national Sports Council policy framework for women and sport in the mid 1980s effectively meant that some of the regional councils were more advanced in their initiatives than the national Council.

In 1988 the WSF applied for membership of the Central Council for Physical Recreation (CCPR), the representative organisation of the national governing bodies of sport and other sports organisations.[14] To their annoyance and frustration the WSF had

their application turned down. At the same time that the CCPR refused to grant the WSF membership, this body wrote to the WSF chair asking for assistance with designing a module on Women and Sport for their Community Sports Leadership Higher Award. The WSF were reluctant to make a commitment to this, concerned about the add-on-women approach to the scheme by an organisation that paid lip service to gender issues. They also felt unable to take on the project without financial support for the work from the CCPR.

Addressing women's needs in sport was hardly a new concept in 1988. Gender inequality had been acknowledged by the Sports Council as early as 1982 when women were identified as a target group for increased participation (Sports Council, 1982). The tensions between the WSF and its organisational environment revolved around the determination of the powerful institutions to maintain full control of the development of British sport, including how it changed its gender balance. In so far as they were prepared to give space to women's issues at all, it was clearly going to be on their own terms. The pressure on the WSF to conform to the expectations of these organisations in order to create partnerships was considerable.

Another significant pressure on the WSF was the need to attract funding to expand as an organisation and develop its work. Put more bleakly, with the difficulty the organisation had experienced in both increasing its membership and getting women actively involved, many members felt that the survival of the WSF depended on attracting external support. At a time when voluntary sector funding was shrinking because of the squeeze on local authorities by central government and with opportunities for commercial sponsorship limited, the WSF decided to reassess its situation. Led by a chair with good connections and a great deal of establishment credibility, the committee set out to change the image of the WSF and develop a positive relationship with the Sports Council and CCPR. In the period 1989 to 1991 the WSF made considerable progress in becoming part of the mainstream. A brief look is taken at the main events in this progress.

A Closer Relationship with the Sports Establishment

One of the first steps taken by the newly elected WSF committee was to open a dialogue with Sports Council national headquarters. A meeting was held in November 1988 whose the purpose was:

> ...to hear of each organisation's strategy for the future and to discuss ways in which the two

> organisations could work together to promote women and sport.
> (WSF, Executive Committee Meeting - Notes, November 1988)

Because of the WSF's different approach, the Sports Council showed signs of interest in joint activities to promote sport to women. A number of points were agreed, including that Sports Council headquarters would circulate regional council liaison officers with the names of WSF regional representatives, and vice-versa to facilitate communications. It was also agreed that the two organisations would work together on some publicity for women and sport.

A "1989 Women in Sport" calendar was produced as a joint venture between the WSF and national headquarters as part of the Sports Council's efforts to distribute positive images of women in sport. The WSF advised on the production, ensuring that women of different ethnic origins, all ages and abilities (including disability) were shown taking part in activities. WSF member Eileen Langsley, a professional sports photographer, supplied the photographs. The significance of this venture was that it established a pilot working relationship between the two organisations.

The Sports Council had indicated that this was necessary before the WSF could make an application for official recognition, and until the organisation was 'recognised' it could not be grant-aided from national headquarters. The "Women in Sport Calendar" was considered to be a success by both parties and the WSF was invited to advise the Sports Council on a number of other promotional materials focussing on women. The WSF was also given a representative place on a newly formed Sports Council Voluntary Sector Consultative Group.

The interaction with the London and South-East Region of the Sports Council at the beginning of 1989 was rather more tricky to manoeuvre. In January a meeting was set up to discuss the criticisms raised by the audit of the London project, and despite the previous problems, the WSF hoped to make a case for extended funding after March 1989. The two main issues were the unsatisfactory blending of London and national work and the incomplete work programmes that had resulted from the staff problems.

The WSF attempted to respond to the criticisms and identified the steps that it had taken to redirect the work of the London office more appropriately through the newly appointed worker. It is interesting that a number of other criticisms of the WSF were also expressed by the Sports Council at the meeting. These comments reveal the antipathy to the

autonomy of the WSF as a women's organisation that was characteristic of the sports establishment:

> ...major concerns were outlined: women's issues seemed to take precedence over sporting issues....the balance of campaigning and development work...the location of the office in the London Women's Centre was also seen as a problem in so far as it was difficult for men to have access to the resource base.
> (WSF, Executive Committee Meeting - Report, January 1989)

The WSF representatives argued strongly that women's issues were the focus of the organisation and that campaigning and development were important aspects of their work which could not easily be separated. They also resisted suggestions that the London project change its name to "London Women's Sports", or move its location to a shared premise with another sport organisation. Despite their precarious position in the negotiations, the WSF managed to gain extended Sports Council funding for 1988/91 and the London project continued.

The terms upon which the London office was grant-aided, however, changed for the second two-year term. The London Borough Grants Unit agreed to fund one full-time post and the Sports Council approved grant-aid for a number of specific projects. Dusty Rhodes, the worker who had taken up one of the existing London appointments in November 1988 was re-employed on a new contract with a slightly changed job description when the new funding came into effect in April 1989. Anxious to observe the boundaries of national and London work more carefully, the WSF took steps to ensure that the membership subscriptions and the newsletter production were nationally supported operations. A part-time administrative worker was employed to process memberships and the newsletter was taken on by the newly formed Press and Publicity group.

Having crossed this bridge with the London and South-East Sports Council, the WSF actively pursued contact with the other Sports Council regions. The WSF agreed a policy of aligning its own regional development with Sports Council regions, the obvious reason for this being that it hoped to gain financial support to undertake joint initiatives for women's sport development. An extensive campaign to encourage women to take up sport had been launched by the Sports Council in 1988/89 with sponsorship from the Milk Marketing Board. The "What's Your Sport?" campaign targeted women between the ages of 24 and 36 and made £10 million available for high profile events throughout the Sports Council regions (Sports Council, 1992). Although the WSF was not able to develop active

regional groups in time to bid for this funding, various WSF individual members established regular contacts with a regional council as a result of the WSF strategy. The profile of the WSF was undoubtedly raised among a number of the regional Sports Council's at this time and some regional projects later received financial support. WSF regional activity varied considerably, depending on individual members around the country having time and energy to put into developing local activities. This is discussed more fully in the next section.

At the same time as working towards a closer partnership with the Sport Council, the WSF attempted to enhance its image with the governing bodies of sport and the CCPR. A meeting organised by the WSF for representatives of governing bodies to discuss women and sport was poorly supported, with only netball, hockey and cricket attending. The feedback from these groups was that "the WSF had projected a critical and uncomfortable political image which had prevented co-operation in the past." (WSF, Executive Committee Minutes, January 1989). A meeting held with the CCPR progressed the relationship between the two organisations, although similar negative comments were made about the image of the WSF:

> The WSF and the CCPR are to hold a joint seminar on April 19th at Francis House for representatives of governing bodies. The programme will include examples of good practice in GB's and two initiatives will be launched; presentations of sponsorship potential and management training for women in GB's...It was stated that our membership of the CCPR had been refused because of the adverse impression our newsletter gave! There should not be a problem with future applications.
> (WSF, Executive Committee Minutes, January 1989)

The seminar proved to be a great success attended by over 70 governing bodies and other CCPR member organisations. The WSF reconsidered its position regarding an involvement with the Women and Sport module for the CCPR Leaders Award scheme in the interests of improving relations. The WSF made a significant contribution to the development of the module which was eventually piloted in local authorities two years later.

Establishing a working relationship with the CCPR enabled increased communication and activity with governing bodies and sports organisations. In October 1989 a joint workshop was held with the British Institute of Sports Coaches entitled, "Women as Coaches - Why So Few?". Links were also developed with the National Coaching Foundation to promote coaching courses aimed specifically at women. Vice-chair Rosie Mayglothling took on the role of WSF governing body representative as the executive member with expertise and contacts in this area. The WSF provided speakers and workshop leaders at individual

governing body conferences that addressed women's issues (mostly leadership). They also promoted the setting up of women's commissions within governing bodies. The purpose of these groups was to examine the situation of women in the particular sport and to develop organisational strategies for creating change.

Events in the wider environment of sport policy shaped the WSF's chosen course of development. The Council of Europe seminar, "Women in Sport - Taking the Lead", in September 1989 represented a significant step forward for women's issues in sport in Britain. The seminar focussed on women's marginal involvement in the leadership of sport and identified action strategies at four levels: personal, organisational, national and international (European Sports Conference Women and Sport Working Group (WSWG), 1989).[15] The event was hosted by the British Sports Council and its planning committee included women who were key figures in the sports world. A number of these women were also WSF members and the conference helped to raise the visibility (and credibility) of the organisation considerably. The close involvement of WSF members in the conference planning process influenced the WSF's adoption of leadership as a key working theme and also helped the WSF's efforts at becoming part of the mainstream.

In May 1990, after only 20 months as WSF chair, Anita White resigned from the organisation. Following her appointment to a senior management position within the Sports Council, it was no longer appropriate for her to maintain a close involvement with the WSF. The committee operated with an acting chair until the 1990 AGM when Monica Vaughan was elected as new WSF chair. A distinguished amputee swimmer with Olympic and world records to her name, Monica had served the WSF as BSAD (British Sports Association for the Disabled) representative and then treasurer over a period of four years. With good foundations laid for moving towards closer integration with the main sports institutions, the WSF committee proceeded to consolidate its efforts in this direction over the next two years.

A WSF submission for national Sports Council recognition was approved in November 1990, clearing the way for the organisation to apply for national funding. This was viewed as a major breakthrough by the majority on the committee, but the decision to proceed was not made without lengthy committee discussion and extensive consultation with the membership. On the whole there was considerable support for a closer partnership with the Sports Council, although there were reservations about the loss of WSF autonomy if

dependency on Sport Council funding reduced WSF control over their own policy:

> On the Sports Council recognition issue, I think we realised that it was the next step forward, that until we had got official recognition, nobody was going to take us seriously. We were always going to be seen as this loony left organisation, and people will know that if we have got the Sports Council endorsing us that, you know, they wouldn't be tagged on to anything as politicized as that. So that's one reason for doing it. There was a lot of debate about it, because it was very much a case of, well you know if we get into bed with them, does that mean that we've got to follow all their policies and we don't have any independence? There was a lot of concern about it.

The experience of repeated pressure from the Sports Council to move out of the London Women's Centre had, however, given some members concerns about the lack Sports Council sympathy with its women-centred approach to issues. Reservations notwithstanding, the move was unopposed and the WSF put in a bid for funding of national development work that was approved in early 1991.

By July 1991, past WSF staff member Dusty Rhodes had been re-appointed as full-time national development officer under special project funding to work on the following project areas:

1. Revised careers pack for national use and seminar organisers pack for regional use.
2. Training module for leadership and confidence skills (including CCPR Award).
3. Information database (positive images pack, support material for GCSE).
4. Co-ordinating the development of existing networks.

(WSF, Newsletter, September 1990).

This was the first time the WSF had been able to attract financial support for *national* work. For reasons discussed shortly, the London project had closed in December 1990 and the WSF had been attempting to keep the office at the London Women's Centre going with a part-time employee and volunteers maintaining basic operations. Although the loss of the London project was a blow to the WSF, it was still able to sustain many of its London contacts. The changing focus to national development work spread the benefit of WSF activities much more widely than had been previously possible.

WSF Networking: Regions and Sub-groups

From its earliest days the WSF had hoped to have a co-ordinating role for the growing number of initiatives in Britain (small and large) that focussed on promoting opportunities for women and sport. Although it never had the resources to fulfil the function it originally envisaged, the WSF put a lot of energy into collecting and disseminating information. The newsletter was important in this process, covering a wide variety of

material ranging from personal experiences of sexism, to information about local activities and groups, to policy developments in the international forum. WSF newsletters make fascinating reading as a historical record of the different enterprises that were opening up sport to women during 1980s. The committee during the early years had recognised the potential of drawing together these multiple efforts :

> The WSF should define itself as a link agency between the masses of local projects and the agencies which operate at national (and international) level. There is no point in us attempting to repeat work which is already successfully underway, what we can and should do is to make sure that women have a voice at the policy-making level of British sport and press for recognition and respect with those major agencies who wield power in sport and recreation. (WSF, AGM Minutes - Chair's Report, 1986)

As the WSF matured, it recognised the importance of pro-active networking and took a more structured approach to this area of its work. Developing contacts and working in partnership became fundamental themes of WSF activity. The personal and professional contacts of individual members were vital to this process, creating a platform from which the working groups could make headway. The committees and worker undertook the majority of the work that went on in the name of WSF, but they were regularly assisted by various other members who worked closely, if somewhat less visibly, with the organisation. These women were an important link in the networking operations of the WSF and also contributed their expertise more directly at times to specific projects.

The WSF stepped up its networking activities between 1988 and 1991, although there was less emphasis on uniting women to have a voice with which to challenge the system, and more emphasis on seeking areas of common ground that linked the WSF the work of major agencies. It is important to qualify that the WSF did not suddenly abandon its advocacy role during this period, but it is apparent that a gradual change began to take place that made the WSF a rather different organisation three years later.

The organisational records provide a number of instances of the committee continuing to campaign for women's opportunities and even making critical comment to major sports agencies.[16] Individual WSF members also undertook advocacy work within their own particular localities and areas of expertise. For example, Enid Grimshaw, co-secretary and regional representative for Wales, doggedly pursued a campaign for women's sporting rights in Wales and lobbied continuously against sexism in her sport of bowling. Eileen Langsley, convenor of the Press and Publicity group, played a key part in promoting opportunities for women in the sports media and also in trying to maintain the WSF's

campaign to improve sports coverage of women. The difference between this period and preceding years was the priority that the organisation placed on developing relations with the establishment and the way that this shaped other areas of its work. The long term effects of this contributed to the shift in the WSF's role away from advocacy and towards sports development.

The working groups provided the machinery for the WSF to pursue its agenda, and therefore played a major role in extending the web of WSF contacts. The purpose of the working groups was described in the Operational Guidelines for Working Groups (WSF, 1989a) as "to further the aims of the WSF in their particular field. They are ACTION groups, not discussion groups or policy making groups" (WSF, Executive Committee Minutes, November 1989). A summary of the activities of the WSF working groups in this period provides an indication of how the WSF attempted to progress its aims.

Although regional development had always been on the WSF agenda, the organisation had found it difficult to make progress in this area beyond the identification of individual members as regional representatives. The early regions were broadly defined and included the north and south of England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland (WSF, AGM Minutes, 1987). The representatives spread the word about WSF through whatever avenues were open to them and fed back information to the committee on relevant activities taking place in their patch. Some of the representatives were more active than others, but efforts at establishing regional groups were generally unsuccessful. London was the most active WSF region on account of the staffed project office, supported by London WSF members through the London Steering Group.

After 1988 the WSF decided to adopt Sports Council regional boundaries and worked hard to form active groups through its elected regional representatives. A WSF Regional Guide (WSF, 1989b) was produced to facilitate their work. This was particularly useful to new committee members taking on the job with little or no background to the organisation. The commitment to developing the WSF at a grass roots level was based on a number of reasons. First, a tangible local presence was perceived as essential to make the WSF more accessible to women and therefore to increasing the membership. In relation to this, it was hoped that a greater diversity of women would join WSF work and also that an active involvement would encourage them to maintain their membership. Thirdly, the WSF aspired to creating a voice for women in sport and it needed a larger and more

representative membership to do this with any legitimacy. Lastly, it was felt that the ability of the WSF to effect change would be greatly enhanced by spreading activity around the country and functioning at both national and local levels. The WSF committee anticipated that as groups became established and identified particular projects in pursuit of the organisation's aims they would be able to gain financial support from the regional Sports Councils.

The more structured approach to regional development produced better results and five WSF regions were established between 1988 and 1991. Inevitably there were local variations, with Wales and the West Midlands continuing a focus on the networking activities of individual representatives, while the South-East (launched 1989), Yorkshire & Humberside and the South (both launched 1991) formed WSF groups that organised local activities. Regional groups provided a forum for women to discuss issues and exchange information, as well as the opportunity to make friends and develop personal contacts. Because they were intended to be action-orientated rather than just talk shops, the groups identified specific initiatives they felt they could organise for women in their area.

The South-East region produced a series of information resources: a South-East Regional Directory of Women Coaches (WSF, 1989c), a Guide to Organising A Women's Activity Day (WSF, 1989d) and a paper about the implications of Compulsory Competitive Tendering for women (Borrow, 1990). The group also organised an enormously successful "Careers in Sport" seminar for girls. The latter project was supported by the Sports Council South-East Region and the Institute for Leisure and Amenities Managers (ILAM). The seminar built on the London work on careers that produced the Guide to Careers in Sport for Young Women and Girls (WSF, 1990a) and generated so much interest that the group decided to make it an annual event. The WSF developed its careers work even further from this regional initiative with the 1990/91 national development officer producing Do It! An Organisers Guide to Careers Seminars in Sport and Recreation For Women (WSF, 1991a) to add to the growing WSF resource base.

The Southern WSF group organised a series of participation events for local women linking with International Women's Week. The Yorkshire and Humberside group promoted a Women-Friendly Sports Centre Scheme to encourage good practice among facility providers.[17] It is significant that the WSF members leading these active groups worked in sports development and community recreation and were able to draw on their valuable

expertise and networks to perform their regional representative roles.

The London office operated as a region until November 1990, albeit on a slightly different basis, with a full-time staff member managed by the London Steering Group. The work undertaken was framed in the four project areas agreed with the Sports Council:

1. Producing the document A Guide to Careers in Sport and Leisure for Women and Girls.
2. Producing Front Runners, a report on good practice in London organisations.
3. Organising two eight week Sports Organiser courses for Black women.
4. Developing coaching programmes with London Boroughs organisations.

(WSF, 1990b)

In addition to these projects, the London worker provided support and advice to leisure and recreation departments, youth workers, schools, colleges and adult education institutions. The materials produced by the London office were of a high standard and reflected the growing professionalism of the organisation. The WSF had by now developed a range of resources for its membership including top quality visual images and information on specialist contacts (coaches, media), as well as practical guidelines for making sport more accessible to women.

The development of a wide grass roots network helped to raise awareness about the goals of the WSF in London and to establish its credibility in an environment where other important equality initiatives were being promoted despite the difficult political climate.[18] A reflection of the increasing credibility of the WSF was a consultancy contract awarded by Harlow District Council Women's Unit in 1990. The WSF provided advice for a major research project undertaken by the Unit looking at equal opportunities access to its leisure services, assisting with the development of the research brief and monitoring the project. The WSF was paid £2,500 for this consultancy work, a considerable supplement to the annual income that was still reliant on membership subscriptions and the sales of WSF t-shirts and resources.

The London management team and worker endeavoured to influence the agenda of the national committee to pay more attention to the needs of minority groups. The London project had established numerous links with black women and felt concerned that their issues in sport were not being recognised. Women in the London group were sensitive to these issues; most of them were working in a professional environment where serious attempts were being made to understand and address the problems. They felt that the WSF should have more of a commitment to raising awareness about the needs of minority groups

of women in sport and attempts were made to encourage the national committee to pursue activities such as an equal opportunities policy for the WSF.

The London group argued that at the very least, it was essential for the WSF to make a public statement of intent about equal opportunities as an employer and service provider. Discussion of a draft equal opportunities policy dragged on over an inordinate period of time with the national committee uncertain about how to proceed without contravening sex-discrimination legislation. The London group interpreted this as a half-hearted commitment to the issue and a lack of support for their attempts at trying to run the project professionally. With communications heavily dependent on bi-monthly committee interaction, the distance that existed between London and national WSF did little to ease the tensions. There was never time at committee meetings to air the issues; this in itself was a part of the problem.

Short term funding contracts and the ongoing uncertainty of the grant-aid system made life very difficult for the WSF London Project. The brunt of this strain was born mostly by the worker and to a degree by the management committee. Although the project was highly productive, there was growing frustration among the women involved who felt their efforts were constantly undermined by the insecure operating environment. There came a point when the dwindling morale of the London group could not be salvaged:

> The grant funding provided by the LBGU has not been increased since 1989 and therefore cannot support the office plus projects and initiatives developed, consequently specific projects receive financial assistance external bodies e.g. Sports Council. However, the constraints imposed by LBGU have resulted in an untenable position in the view of the current officer and the management committee and they have indicated their intentions to tender their resignation upon the expiry of this year's funding contract.
> (WSF, Executive Committee Minutes, September 1990)

The regional networks operated as the roots of the WSF organisational tree, seeking to spread the membership and provide a secure basis for growth. The sub-groups regenerated at the beginning of 1989 represented the branches of the WSF, reaching out from the organisation into the sports world to improve sport for women and girls. The areas covered by the groups included: Media, Sponsorship, Newsletter, Student Matters and Education and Research. After the fallow period, it was appropriate for the groups to redraw their terms of reference and carefully target their goals. Although some of the working groups were unable to sustain their momentum over the next three years, the activities they pursued made an important contribution to the work of the WSF during the

period.

The Mass Media cluster was replaced by a Press and Publicity (P&P) group. Their energies were initially directed towards developing and updating WSF publicity material and working alongside the London office to produce visual-aid resources and careers information. They developed resources such as Guidelines for Dealing with the Media (WSF, 1990c), A Directory of Women in the Mass Media (1991b), and also a set of posters Girls Go For Sport (1990d) that were distributed free to every secondary school and college in England. The latter two projects were supported by the Sports Council.

The P&P group revived the campaign to improve the media's treatment of women in sport, and although some of their ideas were really beyond the scope of the WSF's resources, they contributed to the pressure being exerted on the media. The WSF scheme monitoring coverage was boosted by the offer of a higher education institution to involve students in the research, but without a consistent input from the membership it could not make progress and was shelved. The 1989 Council of Europe Seminar had specifically targeted the sports media to develop strategies to promote women in sport and the P&P group saw this as a potential lever to further their campaign. The group led a lobby to persuade AIPS (International Sports Press Association) to establish a specialist commission for women working in all branches of the media (WSF, 1990c).

The Sponsorship working group consisted of two members with professional expertise in marketing and grant-aid applications. They presented a discussion document with recommended action strategies to the main committee pointing to the limited sponsorship opportunities for the WSF and suggesting a fundraising approach was more appropriate. The proposal to organise a national event that would generate income for the WSF was difficult to implement because the WSF simply did not have the human or financial resources to support it. It was not until 1992 that the long term efforts of WSF members to gain major financial backing finally bore fruit.

The Newsletter group was also closely associated with the P&P group and by 1991 their activities were inseparable. An editorial group was set up in 1989 to separate newsletter production from the London office and to share out the demands of turning out a quarterly publication. Despite the fact that the bulk of this important work WSF fell increasingly on a few women, the quality of the production rose consistently. A professionally printed desk-top published newsletter now replaced the early hand typed and

photocopied effort. For a while the editorial group pursued a policy of incorporating themes into the newsletter production, with disability featured in March 1989, followed by Black women and women from ethnic minorities. In 1991 the P&P group negotiated a contract with Hobson's publishers to launch a Women & Sport magazine. Piloted as an eight page glossy magazine with features including sporting achievements, personal profiles and careers, Women & Sport was distributed to every English secondary school physical education department as an insert in Sports Teacher. Four magazines were during produced 1991 each with a circulation of 22,000 copies. This project was welcomed as a major step forward by the organisation who were delighted to have the opportunity of promoting the name of the WSF on such a scale. The Sports Council financed the pilot for the magazine while the publisher attempted to attract sufficient advertising interest to maintain production. Although the WSF was disappointed when the required advertising commitment could not be met, the groundwork laid by the Hobsons partnership was to prove invaluable when negotiating a major sponsorship deal with Tambrands in 1992.

The WSF Student Matters group, run by two young women from WSIHE (Carolyn Carr and Madelaine Grearly), followed up the work of the 1987 student representative's networking questionnaire. Their work revolved around keeping open channels of communication with students in higher education to ascertain the picture of women's sport in universities and colleges and to promote WSF support services. These links were most productive where a female student union (SU) representative or an SU officer with responsibility for women could be identified. They offered campus based workshops to raise awareness about the work of the WSF and to recruit student members, and encouraged their contacts to use the WSF photographic exhibitions and videos at events to promote the visibility of women in sport.

The WSF Student reps also assisted with the organising of the Student Seminar, an event the WSF had run on an annual basis focussing on student research into women and sport. In addition to networking with individual education institutions the WSF student reps made contact with national student bodies such as the National Union of Students and the British Polytechnics Association. The latter organisation had recently appointed a sports development officer funded by Barclays Bank with a specific brief to increase the participation of women in polytechnic sport and recreation. WSF student work was very productive at this period, but of course vulnerable to the temporary student status of the

members who carried it out. Inevitably, when they graduated in the summer of 1990 and no replacements could be found, student work was put on ice.

The Education and Research (E&R) group produced two comprehensive documents outlining the way the WSF might consider developing its education links, noting the enormity of the task and the limited resources of the organisation (WSF, Education and Research Reports, May 1989; March 1990). Emphasising the need to "walk before we can run", the papers recommended that developing networks with educational organisations and agencies were essential before ambitious projects were attempted. It suggested that this be accompanied by the compilation of a register of expertise that would provide the basis of supporting requests for information and advice.

The WSF received a constant flow of letters asking for bibliographic information on various aspects of women's sport and physical education, and the E&R group produced a series of reading lists to meet this demand. Another major project completed by this group was the design of the CCPR Higher Sports Leaders Award for women. WSF members working in education, both within the E&R group and among the wider membership played an important networking role for the WSF. They kept the organisation updated on developments in their field through communications to committees and articles for the newsletter, and promoted the work of the WSF at conferences and among their own networks.

Summary of Developments between 1989-1991

This period began with a new lease of life as members rallied to build a stronger organisational core after the cumulative problems of the preceding era. The WSF also began to move in a different direction from its original course as a women's sport advocacy organisation during this period. The shift was characterised by a more co-operative attitude to the sports establishment in order to gain acceptance with the institutions that the WSF wished to influence. Changing the strategic approach to pursuing WSF organisational goals was linked to the desire of many committee members to shake off the WSF's image as a political women's organisation, and was influenced to some degree by the changing membership of the committee.

The outcomes of changing their strategy included the WSF gaining recognition from the Great Britain Sports Council (followed soon afterwards by funding of national WSF

projects) and experiencing greater interest from mainstream sports organisation in working in partnership. The activities of the WSF continued to expand through its regional and project groups. Although the London office folded, the WSF was able to build on the work that the project had undertaken since 1987 to develop new national initiatives.

Chapter Six

FROM SPORTS ADVOCACY TO SPORTS DEVELOPMENT (1992-1994)

In 1993 the WSF was ten years old. The organisation had weathered ups and downs in its external operating environment and also a number of vulnerable periods in-house. In many ways the WSF was functioning in a very different framework than during its early years, but at the same time some aspects of the organisation were relatively unchanged. Great progress had been made towards achieving the goals of working with key sporting agencies and gaining major financial support, demonstrated by the acquisition of national Sports Council funding and securing a commercial sponsorship deal. Little progress had been made with developing the membership however, and the WSF was still a small and unrepresentative organisation for women in sport.

After ten years, the WSF's role within the sports community had evolved considerably, shaped by the complex interaction of external events and changing personalities within the organisation. Two trends are discernable in this process of change. First, there has been a shift away from the political analysis of women's issues in sport and an increasing mirroring of the priorities of mainstream sport agencies to facilitate acceptance of the WSF. This can be interpreted as a departure from the possibilities of challenging and re-shaping the status quo and as a gradual co-optation by the sports establishment. The second trend, closely linked with the first, has been the adoption of a sports development agenda at the expense of an advocacy approach to women's needs and interests.

The period 1992-93 was characterised by a whirlwind of activity that many committee members would hardly have believed possible a few years before. An unprecedented raising of the WSF profile occurred in schools and sports clubs around the country following the signing of a major sponsorship package with Tambrands, makers of Tampax products (WSF, Executive Committee Minutes, January 1992). The success of the sponsorship ensured its continuance in 1993, with a further sizeable investment. Three months after the WSF embarked on the Tambrands Scheme, the Sports Council approved a WSF National Development Project, providing base funding of £105,000 for 1993-96 (WSF, Executive Committee Minutes, May 1992). Financial investment on this scale for an organisation that had largely relied on t-shirt sales and membership subscriptions for its national operation represented a long awaited break-through in the minds of many women who had laboured

through the lean WSF years. At the same time that it was developing these major new areas of work, the WSF was conscious that some of its regional groups were fading out and that its specialist sub-groups had once again gone into hibernation. The most recent episode of WSF history is presented by looking at the Tambrands and Sports Council Projects and the emergence of a new organisational culture.

Commercial Sponsorship: The Tampax/WSF Award Scheme

As the WSF went into the 1990s it began to reconsider the possibilities of gaining commercial sponsorship to further its work. Although the shadow of economic recession still loomed large in Britain, the increasing visibility of women in sport represented a market that was of increasing interest to commercial organisations. Members with the relevant professional contacts kept an eye open for opportunities in this direction, and through an interesting series of events, eventually secured a lucrative deal with Tambrands. In 1991 P&P convenor, Eileen Langsley and former WSF chair, Celia Brackenridge attended the USA WSF conference in Denver where they observed presentations of Tampax Awards for girls.[19] Although they felt that a different scheme would be more relevant in the UK, they were very interested in the possibility of replicating the link with Tambrands for the WSF at home. Eileen was able to make contact with a Tambrands representative who had been involved in the US scheme and was moving to work for the organisation in Britain, but nothing came of this.

Another opportunity to pursue the Tambrands link emerged in fairly unusual circumstances. WSF chair Monica Vaughan, a chiropodist by profession, was making conversation while attending to a patient's corns and discovered she was talking to a colleague of the Tambrands Marketing Manager UK! The opportunity was quickly followed up and the WSF were invited to present a sponsorship proposal to the company. In January 1992 Tambrands agreed to invest £250,000 [20] in a Tampax/WSF Sports Award Scheme for young women aged 11-19 years.

A number of factors were influential in the WSF clinching this deal. The Tambrands' marketing policy identified young women in the age range 11 - 19 as a priority target group, based on market research indicating that women were inclined to stick with the same brand of feminine hygiene product for life. An association with sport was highly compatible with Tambrands' marketing message that use of their products enabled women to avoid

disruption to a normal, active life-style:

> So whatever the time of the month, you can stop worrying and just get on with your life - no more excuses for missing a training session.
> (WSF, Tampax Sports Awards Scheme entry form, 1992)

Tambrands were therefore highly interested in the WSF as the only *national* organisation with a brief that focussed on sport and women.[21] This in itself would probably have been insufficient to advance the relationship beyond a mutual interest bearing in mind that, despite its national scope the WSF was still a small organisation with limited visibility in the sports world. A crucial factor in the negotiations was the Women & Sport venture undertaken the previous year with Hobsons Publishers. As a result of the Sports Council funded pilot of the magazine, a channel of communication had been opened up with every secondary school physical education department in England. The marketing potential of this for Tambrands was enormous - direct access to young women of the right age through teachers responsible not just for sport, but also for health and hygiene education.

The Tambrands sponsorship package contained two elements; financing Women & Sport as the official publication of the Women's Sports Foundation, and the Tampax/WSF Sports Awards. The magazine was produced and distributed on the same basis as before with the WSF retaining editorial control. In addition to the school circulation, WSF members received the glossy colour magazine in lieu of the black and white WSF newsletter, with a flyer inserted reporting specific WSF information. The Awards Scheme offered cash awards of between £500 and £5,000 in a number of categories: individual, team/club/community programme, young coach and young sports official. The aim of giving cash awards was to assist young women with the cost of taking part in their chosen sport:

> The awards have been designed to encourage participation, excellence and healthy competition, as well as to recognise and celebrate the achievements of young sportswomen ...finalists will be invited to a prestigious Awards Ceremony where the overall category winners will receive an additional £1,000. The Young Disabled Sports Woman of the Year and the Young Sports Woman of the Year will also be announced and presented with £5,000. An extra £2,000 will be made to the School Sports Team of the year.
> (WSF, Tampax Sports Awards Scheme Literature, 1993)

In its first year the Award Scheme attracted nearly a thousand entries and the winners were presented with their awards at the high profile Tampax/WSF Awards Ceremony. The event was organised by the public relations company that Tambrands had contracted for the scheme, with assistance from the WSF, and held at the Park Lane Hotel with maximum publicity. The first prominent woman television sports presenter in Britain,

Helen Rollanson compared the event and a number of sports celebrities attended as guests: Olympians, Sally Gunnell, Karen Briggs, Sharon Rendle, Zara Long, Ray Stevens, Garry Herbert and Adrian Dodson (WSF, Women & Sport, 1993). Feedback about the Award scheme and ceremony was extremely positive:

> [Tambrands] were so knocked out with the Awards Ceremony and how good it had been, that yes, they would commit themselves to another year, but they wanted to see a big increase in entries...People came out from it last year saying, "This is the best thing that has happened in women's sport in Britain". We got people from all walks of sport, you know, little kids from inner city groups in Leeds sitting next to Olympic medalists. We had young women attending the ceremony from Ireland, from the Orkneys...every single finalist was there.

Only a portion of the quarter of a million pounds invested in the Awards Scheme passed through the hands of the WSF. Tambrands used its own public relations company to promote the award ceremony and dealt directly with Hobsons over Women & Sport. The WSF received £25,000 to administer the scheme which included employing a WSF Awards Administrator on a consultancy contract.[22] Sadie Dressekie had worked with the USA WSF and had some knowledge of their Awards Scheme. Links with the USA WSF through the Award scheme were developed further in 1993 when the UK WSF agreed to employ one of their interns, acknowledging the possibilities for future exchange arrangements. Tootie Scott was employed on a six month contract to assist with the Tambrands administration and act as WSF membership secretary.

The WSF had always maintained connections with its American sister organisation (and also with similar bodies in other countries). This connection was strengthened through the employment of these two staff members who had recently worked for the USA WSF and by the promotion of similar Award schemes sponsored by Tambrands. The USA WSF became increasingly interested in the UK WSF as it entered the world of corporate sponsorship, an approach to promoting women's sport in which the American organisation had made great strides. With a view to enhancing the link between the two organisations, the UK WSF persuaded Tambrands that their Awards Ceremony would benefit greatly from the presence of American WSF representatives. The sponsor increased the budget to pay for Donna Lopiano (Executive Director) and Marjorie Snyder (Associate Executive Director) to attend the 1993 ceremony.

Ensuring the success of the Tambrands scheme demanded a huge input of time from the WSF committee, most of which fell on the shoulders of one woman, Eileen Langsley. As with the acquisition of funding for the London office in 1987, gaining sponsorship was

welcomed as a tremendous development for the WSF, but both these 'advances' placed a considerable strain on the organisation coming at a time when volunteer involvement was far from strong. During the first year of the Tambrands project, the WSF was also in the process of setting up the new national development project. The pressure on the committee to make a success of these projects was two-fold, meeting the expectations of its funding partners and using these long awaited opportunities to put the WSF on the map.

The enormous work load generated could only be satisfactorily completed by members taking on board major responsibilities as individuals. It is important to remember that all of these women were volunteers and already had full-time professional commitments, never mind personal lives. Often it was not possible to keep each other fully informed of their activities and frequently decisions had to be made without the usual level of consultation. The frantically busy committee found themselves fully stretched; during 1992, dealing with the funded projects absorbed the attention of the WSF at the expense of it sustaining working groups. Although pockets of activity still took place, they were heavily reliant on single individuals rather than flourishing groups. Some members of the WSF committee felt increasingly concerned about the changing dynamics within the organisation, although they fully understood the bind that the WSF was in. The organisation had been striving for ten years to gain significant funding to develop its work, and now that it had achieved this, the committee found themselves having to constantly reassess their priorities.

The budget allocated to the WSF was entirely spent on the Awards Scheme, effectively meaning that the sponsorship benefitted the WSF through extensive promotion and publicity rather than providing a cash return. The WSF committee viewed the scheme as having two important functions, improving the visibility of their organisation on a significant scale and directly assisting young women's involvement in sport. They were pragmatic in their decision to become involved in the partnership, knowing that the sponsor would dictate the terms of the venture to maximise their own benefit, but feeling that the return for the WSF justified their involvement. They were always aware that at the point when Tambrands decided to redirect their resources, the Award scheme and its benefits to the WSF would cease. Unfortunately this happened sooner than everyone had hoped:

> The bad news is that they are not sponsoring it next year...they are looking at much more direct TV advertising, so they are just moving right away from sponsorship into something else. Now even though we expected it to some extent, it was a blow. But at the same time you know, you have got to be realistic about commercial sponsorship. They are in it for quite different reasons from us and we have got to accept that as soon as it's not doing them any good, they'll be out

of it and off somewhere else, and we've got to look again. But it is a blow.

The WSF National Development Project

In May 1992 a delegation of WSF representatives made a presentation to the Sports Council in support of the WSF Forward Plan and funding application for a national development project. Although the Sports Council's subsequent offer was for a considerably abridged version of the project outlined by the WSF, they were pleased to accept the support extended to them. A management committee of three WSF members and a Sports Council officer was formed and a full-time WSF National Development Officer (NDO) recruited. Carolyn Carr, former WSF Student Network convenor took up post in February 1993.[23] The National Development Project Year One Report (WSF, 1994a) sets out the clear framework through which the NDO has operated and the details of the extensive work undertaken. After an initial period of consultation with 'key sport and recreation agencies' to identify areas of common ground, the following mission statements were agreed:

> To encourage and support organisations in adopting policies and practices to promote women's involvement in sport at all levels and in all roles.
>
> To promote women's sport through facilitating communication networks, and through the production of resources and information.

The three areas of work identified, Sports Development, Human Resources, and Communication, built on the WSF activities of previous years as well as incorporating new initiatives. Sports Development work focussed on educating facility providers about good practice and encouraging positive action to attract women's participation in sport. A strategy was drawn up for developing a national Women Friendly Sports Centre scheme (originally piloted in the WSF Yorkshire and Humberside region) and attracting a sponsor.

Human Resources aimed at increasing the numbers of women involved in the organisation of sport and reflected the contemporary emphasis on leadership as a key policy issue for women in sport (European Sports Conference Women and Sport Working Group (WSWG), 1989; Sports Council, 1992). A series of careers events were organised by the NDO and two Women in Sport and Recreation Management Training courses set up in conjunction with the Institute of Leisure Amenity Managers. The NDO also worked with the National Coaching Foundation to produce resources and run a workshop looking at ways that policies on developing more women as coaches could be turned into practice. In

preparation for future work on equal opportunities and equity training, a data base on women trainers was produced.

Communication, the third area of the NDO's work focussed on improving and developing WSF networks. Fluctuations in the fortunes of the WSF regions had hit rock bottom in 1993 and the NDO was effectively starting from scratch, although interest in regional groups existed in a number of areas from previous WSF activity. A new WSF region was established in the East Midlands and the Southern region was re-launched. Providing information and resources had always been an important function of the WSF and one in which it had been productive. The NDO developed the organisation's advisory service further with the addition of materials such as The Legality of Women-only Provision: Fact Sheet 1 (1994b) and Money Matters For Women's Sport: Fact Sheet 2 (WSF, 1994c). During the first year of the project the NDO dealt with over 800 enquiries from individuals and sports organisations and also promoted the WSF through media articles for example in Cosmopolitan (Burden, 1993) and The Leisure Manager (Carr 1994).

A New Organisational Culture

Charting a new course in pursuit of its aims after 1988 brought the WSF into different waters in the 1990s and as its operating environment changed, the WSF took on board some of the values and practices of the organisations that it entered into partnerships with. The organisational culture of the WSF that is emerging in current times also has connections with more general changes in attitudes in the British sport delivery system, and with the USA Women's Sports Foundation. An overview of how the WSF changed its bearings has already been provided in the preceding sections. In what follows I shall briefly return to why the WSF went in the direction that it did and then comment on the impact of these choices upon the emergence of a new organisational culture.

In the second phase of its development, the WSF set its sights on gaining a place among the key national agencies that organise and develop sport in Britain and it worked increasingly with the Sports Council towards this end. The logic underpinning this approach was that if you wanted to influence the system you had to at least become a visible presence to those within it and also open some channels of communication. It was further perceived that having 'credibility' within the system had a considerable impact on the ability to not just be noticed, but to shape changes. The experience of having been left out in the cold during

its early years by a sports establishment that clearly balked at the idea of women dictating the terms on which change in sport was needed, led a number of WSF members to feel that different tactics were necessary. They believed that the survival of the organisation was at stake as well as the opportunity of making a contribution to changing sport for women. The catch 22 situation that the WSF has faced in trying to serve women in sport is articulated by a founding member:

> We've always been outside the establishment. Now, I argued that we should be a women's organisation first and that we should be housed in the London Women's Centre rather than in the London Sports Council because of that, but at the same time we loose some of the political power, the leverage if you like, to create policy change and you can also put yourself in the marginal position that you can be dismissed. So, whilst you have the freedom to criticize from the outside, you don't have the credibility to create the change. And we were in this kind of double bind for some time.

During the years when the WSF was moving closer to the sports establishment, there was internal conflict around specific issues linked with the de-politicization of the WSF agenda (e.g. the diminishing concern for minority group needs, and fears for the loss of WSF autonomy), but open resistance to the strategy of co-operation with the 'system' was limited. This can partly be explained by the changing personalities within the organisation and the fact that fewer women involved articulated a political analysis of the issues. [24] The pressure on the WSF to shake off its loony-left-lesbian image came both from within the organisation and from other agencies. A desire to integrate with the sports establishment made the WSF committee prepared to moderate its image (and by implication, its agenda) and to reshape its activities to fit in with the policy co-ordinating role being increasingly undertaken by the Sports Council.

The influence of the major policy making bodies (Sports Council, European Sports Conference) can be seen in a number of the issues included, and excluded, on the current WSF agenda. An extreme example of this is the inclusion of the unlikely topic of drug testing (a Sports Council policy area) on the list of short policy statements produced by the committee (WSF, Minutes, July 1992). Another example is that, in contrast to earlier years, the WSF no longer identifies discrimination against lesbians in sport among the issues it seeks to address. The way in which the WSF defines its work also bears the hall mark of the sports establishment. One of the four WSF visions for 1993 "To increase and encourage women to become involved in sport at all levels and in all capacities", (WSF, 1993b) echoes the aim of the European Sports Conference Women and Sport Working Group, "To

increase the involvement of women in sport at all levels and in all functions and roles", (European Sports Conference WSWG, 1989).

Although undoubtedly the concerns of other organisations overlap with the WSF's priorities, the extent of external influence has become more significant in the past three years. While the co-ordination of policy for improving women's sport is unquestionably a good thing and collective effort between organisations has long been an aim of the WSF, there is currently a dangerous homogenisation of perspectives. The original WSF aim "To improve opportunities for women *in and through sport*" (WSF, 1984) was chosen by the founders of the WSF because it had a very particular meaning for the role that sport could play in women's lives, as well as the role that women should be able to contribute to sport. The WSF no longer uses this phrase in its literature.

The process of building a partnership with the Sports Council has to many minds improved the organisation's planning and management practices. The requirement of producing the WSF Four Year Forward Plan (WSF, 1992b) for the Sports Council funding application (format supplied by the Sports Council) and the close involvement of a sports council officer in the work of the NDO has provided a solid framework upon which the WSF work now focuses. The present WSF committee has developed a comprehensive list of annual visions that details objectives, identifies lead officers and sets timelines in support of its four year plan. It would be incorrect to imply that past committees were unable to set out goals and strategies, however the recent plans demonstrate a particular attention to detail not evident in previous years.

The professional backgrounds of key WSF committee members has tended to be significant in shaping the development of the organisation,and has undoubtedly contributed to the changing organisational culture. In October 1993 a new chair was elected; Tina Slade, past WSF Southern region representative and graduate of WSIHE and Loughborough University took up office. Her recreation management training and work in local authority community recreation has influenced the particular style of operation evident in the current WSF, a style which is highly compatible with the Sports Council's requirements of tight management and organisational accountability.

The WSF relationship with the national Sports Council in the 1990s has been much more structured than during the 1987/89 funding of the London Office. The difference between regional and national Council's practices notwithstanding, the greater emphasis in

later years on detailed planning and accountability reflects the widespread pressure on government agencies to demonstrate control of their activities and value for public money. Wider changes in the organisational environment of sports organisations associated with the Conservative government's intervention into local government (the sector increasingly associated with leisure service provision) has played a significant part in changing general attitudes, placing great emphasis on a professional, corporate approach to operating. (Henry, 1993).

The Sports Council itself had been criticised in a series of government enquiries for its incapacity to exercise effective financial control over its operations (House of Commons, 1986; Audit Commission, 1989). During the 1980s the Sports Council underwent major re-organisation in both the Council membership and the organisational management structure. Houlihan (1991) argues that increasing government directive in the work of the Sports Council characterised by the audit activity and major re-organisations created a new culture with an emphasis on a "Dynamic, business-orientated" Council (p.103).

Few organisations in the public and voluntary sector have been untouched by these changes and the WSF is no exception. The increasing formalisation of the committee minutes and the terminology used within the organisation are small indicators of the new way that its members perceive the WSF. The committee minutes of this period of the WSF's history, in contrast to the early years, are concise if somewhat spartan, recording decisions taken by vote but giving no detail of discussions or debate, even when it is apparent that this has taken place. A current internal communication advises:

> We are all keen to promote the Women's Sports Foundation wherever possible in every way. This may involve attending meetings or working parties and putting forward the WSF perspective, it may involve publicity in local or national media etc, etc. We all need to be very conscious of the fact that in all these situations we are personally projecting an image of the organisation. We therefore need to be careful to ensure that we are promoting the *corporate image* or view.
> (WSF, Internal Document, 1993) (Emphasis added)

The concern to run the WSF in a businesslike manner is demonstrated in the last of the four visions identified for 1993 "To promote, develop and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Women's Sports Foundation in order to strive towards the above visions" (WSF, Internal Document, 1993).

Conscious of the importance of having creditable organisational foundations, recent WSF committees have taken up and progressed two long running internal organisational

issues, sorting out constitutional irregularities and the acquiring legal status (originally pursued under charitable status). The first issue relates to a complex set of events dating back as far as the 1987 AGM when different copies of the WSF constitution were circulated among the membership in error. This resulted in the meeting endorsing the wrong version of the constitution, a matter that was taken up by one committee member a number of years later and pursued to the brink of legal action.

Apart from bitter arguments over the content of the constitution, the issue was complicated by the fact that many of the WSF AGMs (including the 1987 one that adopted the 'bogus' constitution) were in fact inquorate. Saddled with a constitution that didn't reflect the organisation's operating practices or needs, various WSF committees spent a great deal of time and energy attempting to address the problems. Eventually, after an extra-ordinary general meeting called in December 1991 to resolve the issues was also inquorate, the committee introduced postal voting to resolve matters. This important step has cleared the way for the existing committee to make the constitution a relevant organisational tool for the WSF.

The second internal matter that is being progressed after a number of false starts is the move towards gaining legal status as an organisation. A presentation to the 1992 AGM drew attention to the limitations for the WSF of being an unincorporated organisation. These included being unable to hold property in its name, being unable to take legal proceedings as a body and the possibility of individual members of the organisation being liable for the organisation's debts and liabilities (WSF, AGM Minutes, 1992). On a number of occasions the WSF had sought advice about seeking charitable status but had not taken the matter further. A company limited by guarantee was agreed as a more favourable option in 1992 on the basis that holding charitable status in itself would not give the WSF incorporated standing. The responsibilities associated with scale of the Tambrands and Sports Council funding have underlined the importance of the WSF addressing these internal organisational issues, and the committee are pursuing the matter as a priority.

Interaction with commercially orientated organisations has also played a role in shaping the present organisational culture of the WSF, although this influence has perhaps been less significant than that of the public sector. This can be explained by the closer match of organisational values between the UK WSF and government agencies, a scenario highlighted by the difference between the USA and British Women's Sports Foundations.

In Britain the traditional emphasis of government supported sport delivery has been on participation rather than elite sport (Houlihan, 1991), whereas in the USA sport has been dominated by commercial interests.

The Tambrands sponsorship created a commonality between the WSF and its American counterpart for the first time. Although the two organisations have always been in communication, an increasing interest by the USA WSF in their English sisters appears to have been stirred by the Tambrands sponsorship in England. This has been boosted in many respects by recent moves to create international communication between women's sport organisations and also the links created through two staff members.[25] The UK WSF did not see themselves as moving towards the US model, but were pleased to strengthen the relationship in the interests of networking. They were also quite prepared to engage in a selective picking of the organisational brains of the USA WSF. The relationship between the two associations has been characterised by British WSF taking ideas from their American sisters and attempting to rework them in their own cultural and organisational context. This can be seen from the original formation of the national women's sport organisation to the more recent approach to Tambrands for sponsorship. The WSF UK is also increasingly committed to the idea of having an Executive Director which, among other things, would resolve many of the issues that the organisation struggles with as a voluntary organisation employing staff.

It has to be said that in taking on the Tambrands deal, the UK WSF was quite cautious about over emphasising gloss at the expense of making a worthwhile contribution to women and sport. This attitude had been influenced by their impressions of what the USA WSF stood for and was guided by a very different set of organisational values. Understanding the needs (and negotiating position) of their sponsoring partner, the WSF committee nevertheless stood by their commitment to extend the benefits of the Awards scheme as widely as possible:

> I didn't particularly want to do a parallel sponsorship to the thing they had got going in the States, because I thought we could do something more extensive. They were just giving money to a few high schools, it was for high schools to apply and they could get a thousand dollars just to support whatever they were doing in schools... We had fifty thousand pounds earmarked for the awards. What we had said to Tambrands was that we didn't want to see another competition like the Sunday Times Award where you get tons of applications, one person gets the cheque and everyone else gets a pat on the back.

In the process of working with Tambrands and the USA WSF, it is inevitable that

the WSF agenda has been influenced. The WSF's recognition of the importance of marketing know-how has resulted in plans to run seminar's for elite sportswomen to assist them with choosing agents and dealing with the media. With an increased understanding of how the world of corporate sponsorship works and a belief that commercial support is an essential and realistic possibility for the WSF, the committee has continued its work in this direction. WSF committee members have not let the disappointment of losing their Tambrands scheme set them back and in past year have been in negotiations with Honda and Budget Cars for sponsorship of WSF initiatives. The current membership pack bears witness to the WSF's advancement towards an organisational culture that understands the commercial approach to promotion, with a sales pitch that promises potential supporters:

> WSF members get reduced rates on all of our resources, receive our quarterly Women & Sport magazine, as well as corporate discounts and samples
> (WSF, Membership Leaflet, 1993)

If the period 1988 -1991 was characterised by the WSF's re-assessment of its approach to its aims accompanied by an alteration in the direction of travel, the period 1992 to the present represents the WSF's arrival in the terrain it wished to inhabit. The perceived need to change the organisation was about shifting its tactics rather than its goals, but in the process the philosophical framework of the WSF has undergone a discernible transformation. The current organisational culture is focussed on effective performance and promotional activity in contrast to the political concerns of the first WSF committee. The extent of the shift in the ideological foundations of the WSF is perhaps highlighted in the recent agreement to include men as members of the organisation through a Friends of the WSF scheme (WSF, AGM Minutes, 1992).

As a voluntary organisation the WSF has always relied on the energy and commitment of a small group of women and the impressive developments achieved in recent years have not differed in this respect. With a more solid financial base and a sound reputation in 1994, the WSF is arguably in a stronger position than ever before. A major challenge for the WSF in the next chapter of its history, a legacy of past unfulfilled ambition, must surely be to increase and widen the membership to justify the claim on the front of its current promotional literature, "The Women's Sports Foundation - The Voice of Women In Sport" (WSF, Membership Literature, 1993).

Summary of the WSF Between 1992-1994

During the most recent era of the eleven year WSF history the visibility of the organisation within the world of sport has reached an unprecedented level. This has been boosted by the continually developing relationship with the Sports Council, and more recently by the Tampax/WSF Sports Awards Scheme for Young Women and Girls. A new organisational culture has emerged within the WSF that has been influenced to a large degree by the partnerships it has entered into with large and established organisations. A decade after the early meetings debated the politics underpinning the organisation's founding philosophy, the WSF has moved onto rather different philosophical ground. Accordingly, the WSF now operates with completely different organisational strategies and achieves different organisational outcomes. Although the WSF has changed its emphasis, it has not significantly altered its core commitment to providing a national forum through which women's interests in sport are pursued and defended.

The final three chapters of this case-study pick up on some of the issues that have been introduced in the descriptive history of the WSF presented so far. These are drawn together under three broad headings to provide a critical analysis of the organisation and its development.

Chapter Seven

EXPLORING THE ISSUES

My case study of the Women's Sports Foundation was framed by the exploration of three themes: (1) the connections between feminism and the WSF; (2) the politics of sexuality; and (3) dealing with differences among women. In this chapter I examine how these themes have been played out in the history of the organisation and explore a number of relevant issues. Although the themes are presented as three distinct subjects, there are many points at which the issues that relate to them overlap. There has also been a particular trend in the organisation's development which throws the connections between these themes into sharp relief. This trend is the steady de-politicisation of the WSF's agenda over the years, characterised by a shift from its radical origins as a women's organisation focussing on sport, to its current position as a sports organisation with a liberal approach to improving sport for women.

The Connections Between Feminism and the WSF

As a member of the WSF I was aware of the reluctance of many of the women within the organisation to be identified as feminists and also of concerns that if the WSF was seen as a feminist organisation this would alienate us from the rest of the sportsworld and from potential members. In this section I want to explore the connections that did exist between feminism and the WSF and also what lay behind the apparent contradiction of the WSF pursuing feminist aims while refuting a feminist identity. A useful starting point for the discussion is to clarify how I have used the terms liberal and radical feminism in relation to WSF members and the organisation's agenda, and to identify the basis on which I describe the WSF as a feminist organisation when its members themselves do not use this label.

The implications for sport of the various feminist theoretical positions that explain women's oppression have been well documented (Hall, 1985; Lenskyj 1988, 1994). Boutilier and San Giovanni (1983) make the important point that the different feminist approaches should be seen as complimentary rather than antagonistic and argue that there is value in women working for social change from a variety of fronts. The liberal approach to women's issues in sport is based on the assumption that women's disadvantage lies in their lack of equal opportunity. Inspired by ideals of human individualism and the morality of human

rights, liberal strategies for equalising women's status in sport focus on reforming the structures to provide all individuals with the same access. Women are encouraged to work within the existing male-dominated system as part of the process of achieving change.

Radical feminist analyses of sport draw attention to the connections between sport, femininity and sexuality and the way that men have historically controlled females through these cultural institutions. The importance of women's agency is emphasised in the ideological struggles that occur within sport, as is the potential for challenging male hegemony in wider social relations through these struggles (Hargreaves, 1994). Strategies for achieving change are usually based on replacing male definitions and standards imposed upon female experience with women-centred alternatives. Promoting women's autonomy is seen as crucial and gives rise to women's attempts at redefining sport for themselves. Unlike the liberal approach which takes for granted women's universal commonality as women, radical feminist analyses acknowledge the different ways that women experience oppression and the implications of power and privilege distributed unevenly among women, as well between men and women.

In attempting to apply these descriptions to the ideological positions held by individual members of the WSF, or to the philosophy of the organisation, there is a distinct danger of over simplifying a complex and constantly changing picture. The reality has been that although divisions between a radical and liberal approach can often be clearly identified, there have also been times when members and the organisation have blended the two approaches. An example of this is the radical stance taken by the WSF founding members in adopting a women-only structure, while at the same time electing to operate within the sports structures rather than be a separatist organisation.

Nevertheless, a number of the women I interviewed used the labels of radical and liberal feminism in a context that supported the widely held meanings outlined above. Other women were less clear about different feminist positions and interpreted 'feminism' in its more general sense of acknowledging that women are disadvantaged compared to men accompanied by the commitment to improving women's social, economic and political status.

Martin (1990) operates from this broad definition of feminism to provide a framework for identifying whether an organisation is feminist or not. Her analysis addresses the issue that some organisations pursue feminist goals without necessarily adopting an overt stance and it provides an opportunity to understand the variety of forms and practices of

feminist organisations. Martin proposes that an organisation qualifies as feminist if it has any of the following dimensions: founding circumstances associated with the women's movement, feminist ideology, feminist goals, feminist outcomes and feminist values. The following discussion draws on the Martin framework to argue that the WSF should be seen as a feminist organisation, albeit one that has become increasingly liberal over time.

Founding the WSF on Feminist Principles

The founding members of the WSF included women who with little or no political consciousness about gender issues in sport and also a couple of women who (uncharacteristically for sportswomen) had been directly involved in political organising within the women's movement. The women with strong feminist convictions proved to be highly influential in the founding stages, having a well thought out analysis of the problems women faced in sport and the confidence to articulate their ideas. There were tensions between these two positions, mediated to some degree by the developing feminist consciousness many women experienced as a result of the group interaction:

> Whilst the WSF was being born, I was struggling through the early stages of feminist consciousness and all that stuff. It was a very exciting and very challenging time for me.
>
> We sat around and chatted and discussed things. I think there was a lot of value in that, because for people like me who had never really thought much about the issues, not in any depth, just to listen, even though I violently disagreed with some of them, (especially on the issue of male membership) it opened my mind to a lot of things. It has very much influenced the way I am now and the way that I think. I mean I've become much more feminist in my views.

It was significant that the women with strong feminist convictions were radical feminists and openly lesbian. Their influence in the founding stages of the WSF is apparent by looking at the organisation at this point in its history through Martin's five dimensions of feminist organisation. Only one of these dimensions does not apply to the WSF; its founding circumstances were not associated directly with any aspect of the women's movement.

In terms of a feminist ideology, the WSF did not explicitly declare its feminist orientation, but the original organisational statement of aims and objectives clearly endorsed feminist beliefs (See Appendix I). Women's disadvantage in sport is emphasised along with the organisation's commitment to fighting discrimination and achieving a transformation of sport to benefit women. The eventual consensus reached over having a women-only organisation was the result of careful and persistent argument by women committed to the

principle of women's autonomy. This move met with a great deal of resistance and was widely viewed as the WSF adopting a radical feminist stance; a decision valued by some and seen as threatening by others:

> It was really a case of a liberal feminism and a radical feminism coming head to head right at the beginning. Most of the sportswomen were liberal feminists and didn't understand the radical position. The radical position was, "This is our organisation and men have no place in it". Also the radical position was to say that sexuality is an issue. The liberal feminists wanted to work with men and they didn't want to confront issues of sexuality early on, their view was, "We've got enough to cope with dealing with women's interests without focussing specifically on sexuality. But there was a lot, you know, there was a lot of ignorance. There was a lack of understanding and there were a lot of difficulties.

The goals of the WSF during its early years were clearly feminist in orientation, focussing mostly on an external action agenda. For example, the WSF pursued an active and public campaign to fight discrimination against women in sport. This approach to improving opportunities for women was not always well received by the wider sports establishment and contributed to the perception of the organisation as a radical women's group with a political agenda. Attempts at pursuing an internal agenda centring around addressing issues of power within the group were less successful. In many ways the demands made upon the WSF by its external agenda undermined the possibilities of an internal agenda focussing on empowering individual members. Some of the radical feminists on the WSF committee tried to address issues of power within the group and to raise awareness about the needs of lesbians, women of colour and working class, but these debates were often eclipsed by the prioritization of the external agenda.

Despite this, an indirect outcome of the WSF's activity in its early years that may be characterised as feminist was the raising of the political consciousness of many women active within the organisation. This included women coming to a clearer understanding of the processes at work behind discrimination in sport, and also some women adopting a more radical analysis of the issues. It is difficult to be specific in assessing the transformational outcome of the WSF's external agenda, although the organisation undoubtedly played a significant role putting women's needs on the agenda of the organisations that control British sport.

The founding group endeavoured to incorporate feminist values into its internal operations, again under the guidance of radical feminists who brought their experiences of the women's movement into the WSF. This is evident in numerous organisational practices: the decision to have a non-hierarchical organisational structure with co-chairs and co-

secretaries; sharing the burden of travel to meetings by rotating venues and pooling travel costs; and endeavouring to be supportive and co-operative of each other despite some quite marked differences. There were sometimes tensions surrounding the attempts to make the feminist process work between women with different levels of feminist consciousness. However, the general consensus from the women I interviewed was that this was a positive dynamic in the long run:

> One or two of the women had very good consciousness. You know, somebody once passed a little note right around which said, "Could you please stop using jargon." My awareness was rising by degrees. I couldn't have a table to put my papers on, because it wasn't... Stupid actually - one of the silly things about radicalism that are just not practical. But okay, so I learned to watch everything I said. I learned to be careful of my own behaviour towards black women, working class women, you know. One was constantly reminded by X and the women she brought into the organisation. I mean she has been my education as far as this feminist consciousness is concerned. Along with Kate Millet and a few other people (chuckle). It was really very interesting and challenging.

From Radical to Liberal Feminist Philosophy

Eleven years after it was founded, the WSF can still be classified as a feminist organisation, fulfilling the four dimensions described above. There are, however, subtle but significant differences in the way that the organisation meets these criteria. These stem from the organisation's departure from its radical origins and its concerted effort to shake off its image as a radical feminist organisation. As the women with experience of feminism outside of sport and the WSF moved on, the connections between feminism and the WSF changed. The loss of the radical influence within the organisation has not resulted in the WSF abandoning its feminist orientation, but it has made this less visible to outside agencies. It has also meant that the connections between the WSF and feminism escape many of the current members.

The ideological position of the WSF remains relatively consistent with that of its founding period; the organisation still acknowledges that women are not equal with men in sport and it continues to be committed to achieving changes for women. The current organisational literature focuses more on raising the profile of women's sport than on addressing discrimination. Early attempts at politicising minority group issues has given way to a general acknowledgement that women have different needs without addressing the dynamics of power within this. There is no longer any attempt by the WSF to promote lesbian visibility in sport whereas in previous times lesbians were featured on both the WSF

leaflet and membership form. A number of external factors that were beyond the control of the WSF proved to be highly influential in the gradual disappearance of references to lesbians in WSF literature. These are discussed more fully under the politics of sexuality.

The organisational goals still focus on gaining equal opportunities for women, although the approach has shifted away from advocacy work to a sports development approach. There is more co-operation between the WSF and the sports establishment resulting in markedly less criticism of these institutions by the WSF. The outcomes of the WSF's external agenda also continue to benefit women, for example by educating service providers about women's issues and promoting positive images of women and girls taking part in sport. Although there still is not an explicit internal agenda focussing on empowerment, women currently involved on the committee spoke positively about the outcomes of their experiences within the organisation:

> I think I've learned a lot from the Women's Sports Foundation really, meeting all the different people and hearing all the different views. When you come from a particular background and community, and are going through your career you tend to meet people with similar views. But when you actually meet with a range of different women and hear all the different views of people from other backgrounds - although as you were saying earlier, there is still scope for attracting other women into the Women's Sports Foundation which is something we need to work on - you do learn a lot. You become more aware and sensitive to different issues. I'm sure this has influenced my work.

The difference in organisational outcomes in terms of transforming its members compared to earlier years is the lack of specific reference to feminist consciousness raising when identifying how change had occurred. Members felt they had learned about women's issues in sport, but they did not indicate that they had developed a political analysis from the interaction. The changing group composition over the years and the organisation's decision to play down a feminist image has undoubtedly had an impact upon this process.

All the women that I interviewed who have worked with the WSF in the second half of its eleven year history commented on the group's attempts at creating a mutually supportive environment. The sharing of responsibility and the emphasis on co-operation was particulary effective when the organisation experienced a new lease of life in 1989 and the current group have inherited the legacy of this approach. The chair of the time spoke about her commitment to this way of working:

> I believed in collective responsibility. From two angles: from a feminist principle and from a practical principle. When I came, what I decided I would try and do was to embody the principle of empowering other women, and really use the skills of those women who said they were prepared to be on the executive. It was also some kind of survival mechanism in terms of how I was going to cope with this on top of everything else that was going on in my life.

Women who have subsequently joined the group have been influenced by this aspect of the organisation's culture, but it is interesting that for a long time this has not been openly identified as part of a 'feminist' process. The recent AGM decision to allow men to be members of the WSF indicates the extent to which the organisation has now adopted a liberal feminist agenda.

Finding its Niche in an Institutional Environment

The connections that have existed between the WSF and feminism have come about as a result of individual members bringing their ideas and politics into the organisation rather than because of interaction between the WSF and the women's movement. Although some of the founding members worked hard to promote the WSF as a women's organisation and not just another sports organisation, this proved difficult to sustain. This was largely because the WSF sought to establish itself in the institutional environment of the sportsworld and developed few connections with organised feminism.

The feminist sports literature notes the gap that exists between sports activism and feminism (Lenskyj, 1991b; Hall, 1990; 1994, in press; Hargreaves, 1994; Talbot, 1988a). This gap has had a significant influence on the development of women's sports advocacy organisations, with pressure experienced by these bodies to identify their concerns as sports issues rather than women's issues. The British WSF has struggled with this over the years. It has shifted from its early stance as a women's organisation working in and through sport to improve women's lives, to a sports organisation pursuing equity for women in sport. The significance of the change is the de-politicisation of women's issues in sport and the reluctance to make a political analysis of the role that sport plays in maintaining unequal gender relations more generally. The mutual antipathy that exists between sport and feminism has worked against the possibility of the WSF building bridges with the women's movement. The barriers to the creation of organisational links are considered from both sides.

The support within the WSF for adopting an identity as a political women's organisation was never unanimous. Although it has only been very recently that the gender structure has been changed, the tensions surrounding the women-only membership of the WSF have undermined the organisation's attempts to operate as a women's organisation. The early emphasis on the political implications of women's issues in sport came from a

handful of persistent women and was far from a majority view. Very few members of the WSF have had connections with feminist activism outside of sport. Most sportswomen tend to adopt uncritically the prevailing cultural view of sport as 'a good thing'. Fundamental to this is "the common cliché that sport and politics should not mix." (Houlihan, 1991, p.5). This has made it difficult to break down the conventional distance between sport and feminism.

The woman's movement has taken little interest in sport, presumably because as a male institution characterised by competition, hierarchy, and even violence, sport is an anathema to many feminists. Obviously issues that have a greater impact on women's lives such as re-productive rights, employment equity and violence against women, have been of greater concern to women engaged in political activity on behalf of other women. Nevertheless, given the feminist interest in the politics of the body, it is surprising that sport has not been more recognised as a potential site of resistance to male oppression. In Britain feminist engagement with sport has largely taken place within academia or as small grass-roots initiatives operating outside any established institutional environment (Hargreaves, 1994; Talbot, 1988a).

Apart from the apparent indifference of feminist groups to sports issues, the nature of the British women's movement at the time the WSF emerged was not conducive to the WSF being able to find a niche in this organisational environment. In making this point, I recognise that conceptualising the British women's movement as an 'institutional' environment is in itself somewhat problematic. This is because it is a diverse and complex web of organisations, intentionally connected by a loose structure as an act of resistance to male models of hierarchy and organisation (Lovenduski and Randall, 1993). However, this informal composition itself made it difficult for the WSF to identify a tangible relationship with other women's political organisations. In the 1980s the British women's movement underwent further fragmentation as a result of clashes between radical and socialist feminists, black and white feminists, and an emerging politics of identity.

This fragmentation generally made it difficult for the WSF to find suitable points of interaction with the women's movement that might have helped the organisation to strengthen its women-centred approach and political vision. Connections were made with some feminist groups in the very early years, such as the Labour authority women's committees and the Women's Media in Action Group, but these were not developed. The WSF pursued various agencies within the sports structures to establish working links far

more vigorously than it attempted to create links with other women's groups. This was partly because it wanted to influence sports organisations to effect change for women in sport, but also because of the reluctance of many of its members to be linked with feminism and also the nature of the women's movement itself.

In Britain, unlike other countries, the liberal or reformist strand of feminism has traditionally been very weak (Randall, 1992). Women in the WSF who have not identified with the women's movement have generally not been sympathetic to the main feminist approaches of radical and socialist feminism. It is interesting that in countries with a stronger liberal feminist tradition, such as Canada and the USA, women sports activists have been more prepared to adopt a specific feminist identity.[26] The reluctance within the WSF to be associated with feminism has in many ways been more specifically a resistance to radical feminism. The reasons behind this are now explored.

Ambivalence Over a Feminist Identity

Despite the gains made for women by the political activity of the women's movement, and even though public attitudes about women's role in society have become less conservative (Jowell, Witherspoon & Brook 1988; Jowell, Brook, Prior & Taylor, 1992), many women in Britain chose not to associate with feminism and the public at large are not sympathetic to its cause (Gelb, 1989). The media have played a major role in giving feminism a bad press in Britain. Throughout the 1980s feminism has been caught up in negative media representations of the ideological conflicts between the Left and the Right that centred on power struggles between central and local government.

Key to this was the attempts of the Conservative controlled press (particularly the tabloids) to discredit Labour run Metropolitan Councils by sensationalizing the public financing of minority group projects as bizarre, inappropriate and a waste of tax payers' money. These initiatives were often radical and innovative, offering opportunities to traditionally disadvantaged social groups such as women, people of colour, and gays and lesbians. While sexist and racist media presentations were slightly more subtle, homophobic reporting blatantly used associations with lesbian and gay issues to create negative public attitudes (Stacey, 1991). The phrases 'loony left' and 'loony lesbian left' have become widely adopted language with very specific cultural meanings. Feminism has been presented as synonymous with the latter label, because it represents a potential threat to the male

controlled status quo and therefore has to be contained. In addition, the flowering of municipal feminism within Labour Councils during the 1980s provided a visible manifestation of women's politics (Lovenduski and Randall, 1993) that demonstrated its inter-connections with the Left.

The regulatory power of these images should not be underestimated. Many women in the WSF found themselves torn between their desire to support the woman-centred focus of the organisation and anxiety about the consequences of being associated with feminism and women's politics:

> The WSF became a women's organisation. That was the point at which I think a lot of people opted out of it. And it was also the point at which the organisation came to be perceived, outside of the organisation, as a radical feminist loony left lesbian lot.
>
> Well yes, because you know were all tarred with that brush. Yeah... I mean... oh crumbs...we just had awful problems with it. And at that time we were getting funding via the GLC and the London Borough Grants Scheme and the whole perception was you know, it was loony left wing.
>
> We were seen as a lesbian organisation and we were seen as a politicized organisation. It's taken us a long, long time to get over that. To some extent we still haven't. I mean it's a major PR exercise every time we're out there, particularly at things like the awards ceremony.

Public perceptions of feminism in Britain were largely based on negative stereotyping of radical lesbian feminism, the strand of women's political activity that was in its ascendancy during the 1980s. The central premise of radical feminism that women's oppression is rooted in their relationships with men and the focus on issues of sexuality made it a very threatening politics, not just for men, but for women who found separatist strategies unacceptable. Within the women's movement bitter struggles over these issues kept feminists from working together throughout the decade, although it also opened up new ground for challenging men's control over women (Lovenduski and Randall, 1993). Within the WSF the ambivalence over a feminist identity rooted in homophobia prevented its members from fully addressing the political implications of sport, and also from exploring how the fear of lesbianism serves to constrain all women's opportunities in sport. As tensions that have bubbled under the surface throughout the organisation's history, these issues invite a closer examination.

The Politics of Sexuality

The politics of sexuality have been a distinctive force shaping the development of the WSF, although they have rarely been articulated and certainly not addressed as an

organisational issue. Conflict arising from competing sexual identities revolves around the reluctance of heterosexual women to acknowledge the existence of lesbians through a series of overt and covert practices. The homophobic processes at work within the WSF reflect wider social mechanisms that operate through sport to regulate sexuality (Lenskyj, 1986). A number of tensions rooted in sexuality issues that have been evident throughout WSF history are now examined.

The efforts of the WSF to provide a focus for women to define their own needs in sport has met with considerable resistance, because it represents a challenge to sport as a male defined domain. Powerful social control mechanisms operate to limit women's influence in sport. Rooted in the ideology of natural differences, these processes work to preserve sport as a cultural activity that validates a particular kind of masculinity and to ensure that women's involvement is restricted to areas which do not undermine this. Hargreaves (1986) demonstrates how women themselves often collude in these processes, preferring to accept the status quo rather than risk disapproval or rejection.

The questioning of women's sexuality is one of these control mechanisms. At a general level this has inhibited women's participation in sport (Cahn, 1994; Lenskyj, 1986); more specifically it has influenced the way that the WSF has operated. Radical feminist perspectives argue that lesbianism has been socially outlawed because it threatens the heterosexual norm that upholds male privilege (Rich, 1980). Lesbians are at best marginalised, and at worst experience outright hostility and even violence. Homophobia generated by the lack of social acceptance for lesbians has kept many lesbians closeted and prevents heterosexual women from supporting those lesbians who are prepared to struggle for visibility. This dynamic has framed the politics of sexuality within the WSF. Every woman in the organisation has been aware that adopting a lesbian-positive stance would make an already difficult job even harder:

> ...it's just about if you are a lesbian and that is enough, you know, that's enough for some people to trash the organisation basically.

The enormous social pressure that prevents women from taking control of many areas of their lives thrives on women's qualms about crossing acceptable (male-defined) boundaries of femininity, and even more significantly, on their fear of being labelled a man-hating lesbian.

Women-only means Man-hating Lesbians

The decision to adopt a woman-only structure by the WSF was accepted reluctantly by many founding members and was also the reason for many women departing at this particular time. Some members agreed with the need for women to control their own organisation and define the solutions to the problems, but they also felt concerned about the implications of excluding men. Although these concerns were largely presented as arguments about reverse sexism and the wrongs of exclusionary practice, they often masked deeper fears about being labelled anti-male. Because lesbianism has been portrayed by those who wish to discredit it as anti-male, an additional concern for many women was that they did not wish to be labelled lesbian. The WSF was not a separatist organisation and fully intended to engage with the male structures of sport. Its members were willing to work with supportive men (on terms they wished to have some control over) to improve sport for women.

In its attempts to establish links with the Sports Council, the WSF faced criticism about its woman-centred focus and experienced pressure to re-align itself with a sporting rather than women's organisational environment. This included it being asked to move out of the London Women's Centre and share office accommodation with other sports agencies. The argument behind the request was that it was very difficult for men to have access to the organisation. Symbolically, such a move would have undermined the autonomy of the WSF as a women's organisation.

The WSF's attempts to provide alternative woman-centred answers to gender issues in sport have frequently been interpreted as anti-male and, by association, lesbian. The creation of a misleading connection between woman-positive and anti-male was at the root of the perceived problem with the WSF's image during its early years. Although rarely brought into the open, this tension was as much to do with homophobia as it was about gender struggles over power. Undoubtedly the move by women to gain greater equality in sport had threatening implications for male interests, not least the reallocation of material resources and power. Women's disadvantage in sport was never seen as the result of misogyny, but the attempts by radical feminists to address the underlying causes of discrimination were widely viewed as rooted in anti-male sentiment.

There has been continual pressure on the WSF to prove that it is not anti-male and open the organisation to men. This has come both from the membership and also from

individuals (men and women), and organisations external to the WSF:

> I get asked, "Are men members of your organisation? If not, why not?" There has been a lot of discussion around this. When I did a presentation about the WSF, a guy at the back put his hand up and said, "Can men be members of the organisation?" I thought, "Oh god, somebody was bound to ask that question." So I gave him the spiel and there were women in the front going, "Oh gosh, sigh." You know, "Fancy not allowing men to be members!" And there was a lot of bad feeling from women that we weren't allowing men to be members. I went to meet a guy at the Sports Council in the South-West region and he said he thinks it is really off-putting to a lot of people if men can't be members of the organisation.

As the WSF has become increasingly involved with the sports establishment during the last five years this pressure has mounted. With gender equity more widely accepted as policy area and with increasing numbers of sports development projects, the WSF has experienced greater interest in its work and resources. The enhanced visibility of the WSF within the sports structures has brought with it greater expectations of conformity, and considerable criticism of its women-only structure. The 1992 AGM supported the committee's proposal that a category of male membership should be introduced to the WSF.

Struggles over Lesbian Visibility

The visibility of lesbians within the WSF has been a major source of tension. This was particularly true during the first five years of the WSF history when lesbian members were more outspoken and the organisation adopted a more political role than in later years. When the need to recognise specific disadvantaged groups of women was being debated during the founding years, a few lesbian committee members insisted that their identity be acknowledged in organisational statements. The early WSF literature includes a number of references to lesbians:

> Recognising the many needs of women as a whole we distinguish the special requirements that we all have because of differences in age, racial origins, class, sexuality, disability and religion.
>
> Lots of people think that all sportswomen are lesbians. Well some of us are. So what? - Jane Evans
> (WSF, Membership Leaflet, 1984)

The general reluctance of WSF members to discuss issues of sexuality meant that these demands were never publicly challenged, although many women during the early years had private concerns about the potential harm to the organisation of its association with lesbianism. Attempts at promoting lesbian activities through the newsletter frequently brought negative reactions from the wider membership. Despite this, the refusal of individual lesbians within the organisation to be made totally invisible meant that the WSF

continued to publish the occasional lesbian event or group until recent years.

It is significant that resistance to lesbian visibility within the WSF has rarely been open, occurring as written complaints to the executive committee, or private conversations. On the odd occasion when the subject of lesbianism has been brought up at annual general meetings, the members assembled have been reluctant to discuss this in any depth. At the 1988 AGM, for example, a member suggested that the cover of a WSF newsletter depicting women abseiling into the House of Commons in protest at Clause 28 was inappropriate, because the event had nothing to do with the WSF.[27] This comment was received with a great deal of embarrassed shuffling and a few jeers from lesbians in the meeting, but not opened up as a subject of debate to address the implications of discrimination for lesbians in sport. At the 1989 AGM a lesbian member made a public complaint about the omission of the word lesbian from the recently redesigned membership form. Again, the raising of the taboo subject created a response characterised by extreme discomfort and resentment, and an aversion to discuss the matter.

This reluctance to confront lesbian issues means that there have been few opportunities for debate which might provide women with a chance to explore the implications of homophobia in sport for all women. The silence that surrounds the subject of sexuality has mostly been broken by lesbians making an occasional stance to prevent their existence from being totally eradicated from the organisation. The power of homophobia within the WSF is pervasive. It has prevented women from discussing the issues in the relative safety of the small committee group. Although lesbians have always been an active and valued part of this group (but as women rather than lesbians), and friendships have developed between straight and lesbian women, the risks of engaging with the politics of sexuality are seen as daunting to both sides. Heterosexual women have been fearful of being labelled lesbian by being associated with a lesbian-positive organisation, and many lesbians choose to remain closeted as a survival strategy:

> Everybody knows what is going on and nobody will use the words. One of my disappointments in the WSF is that I think it has always managed to squeeze out working class women and lesbians...There have always been dykes in the organisation. A lot of us have put our heart and soul into the WSF. But no-one, you know, most were so fucking reluctant to be out lesbians. That's the difference between us and CAAWS. You know, it was a cop out.

Members of the WSF have been caught up in the strategic games that many women play in the world of sport, aware of the potential hostility, derision, and threat to personal and

professional life that being labelled a lesbian can provoke.

Issues of specific concern to lesbian women have not been addressed by the WSF because of the lack of unanimous support. When the anti-homosexuality legislation, Clause 28, was passing through Parliament in 1988, the WSF reported this in a newsletter, accompanied by an appeal for members to support the WSF's commitment to all women in sport. Because it prohibited local authorities from 'promoting homosexuality', Clause 28 had direct implications for lesbians in sport. Although individual members were active in the campaign against the legislation, the WSF did not take an organisational stance.

Central to the silence around lesbianism within the WSF is the separation of sexuality from politics. There is an unspoken expectation that sexuality be respected as a private issue. The de-politicisation of the WSF agenda over the years has been significant in discouraging lesbians within the organisation from being politically active around their oppression in sport.

The Impact of External Events on Homophobia Within the WSF

The importance of context and changes in the wider environment of the WSF must be taken into account in understanding how issues of sexuality have been suppressed. A number of events that occurred during the 1980s contributed to this.

During the decade that the WSF has been in operation, public attitudes about homosexuality became less tolerant (Jowell *et al*, 1988, 1992). Significant in this were attacks on 'loony lefties' in local government that were fuelled by their association with gay and lesbian issues. This has already been discussed in some depth when exploring the homophobic reaction to feminism. Another major factor in the changing climate of opinion has been the connections made between homosexuality and the spread of AIDS:

> The AIDS crisis had been used as an opportunity for renewed homophobic attacks on gay men. Underlying this increased hostility was an increased pathologization of homosexuality, associating it with promiscuity, disease and a risk to both public health and morality. The 'dangers' of homosexuality had thus been firmly implanted in the popular imagination, and the prevention of the spread of AIDS was easily associated with the prevention of the spreading of homosexuality itself.
> (Stacey, 1991, p.285)

Although AIDS is associated with homosexual males rather than lesbians, the increasing levels of homophobia during the 1980s impacted upon the lives of both.

A third important contextual factor that was highly influenced by the first two was

the Thatcher government's introduction of legislative controls over sexuality. Clause 28 had a devastating effect upon many gay men and lesbians, particularly those who feared losing the children they cared for. Stacey (1991) acknowledges the problems the legislation created, but also argues that the government's move to control sexual choice spurned new activities of resistance in the gay community which fostered gay pride and solidarity. The WSF was untouched by the development of these opposing strategies, and experienced only negative outcomes.

The Clause 28 legislation and the growing hostility to lesbians that it generated served as a nail in the coffin for the limited WSF attempts at putting sexuality on the agenda. The WSF was increasingly establishing links with local authority leisure departments, and as the legislation specifically prohibited local authorities from engaging in activities that promoted homosexuality, maintaining these links made the chances of the WSF taking a lesbian-positive stance impossible. The decision to become more established within the sports structures in the second half of its history put pressure on the WSF not to raise issues of sexuality or to acknowledge the presence of lesbians in sport. Events in the wider political climate added significantly to this pressure with the result that the politics of sexuality have become a silent and invisible dynamic of organisational life. The fact that these issues have been suppressed does not, of course, mean that they have disappeared.

Dealing With Differences Among Women

The final theme explored looks at the way that the WSF has attempted to pursue its commitment to promoting the interests of *all* women in and through sport. Inclusiveness was a fundamental tenet of the philosophy upon which the WSF was founded:

> *Aim*:
> To promote the interests of all women in and through sport, and to gain equal opportunities and options for women.
> *Objective (1)*:
> To involve women from all walks of life and with as many and varied opinions as possible in a network to facilitate the achievement of the group's aim. There will be no discrimination whatsoever on the grounds of race, disability or sexuality and special consideration will be given to women who face particular difficulties.
> (WSF, 1984)

The naming of groups who face particular difficulties reflected an awareness that 'woman' is not a universal category. The corollary of this statement is that attention needs to be given to the specific needs of different groups of women.

Two particular factors were influential in the WSF's emphasis on inclusiveness. First, the founding members were concerned to create a very different organisation from the USA WSF, which they saw as catering for a very narrow group of women by focussing on elite sport. A second influence was the Sport For All philosophy that originated in the 1976 European Sports Charter and which had become a central part of British sport policy. The emphasis on attending to the differences among women and highlighting the needs of minority groups was shaped by the views of founding members with feminist and socialist politics.

The reconciliation of tensions around acknowledging difference while maintaining a collective identity has been problematic for the WSF throughout its history. I believe that the WSF's difficulty in involving women from all walks of life in the organisation is closely tied to its failure to adequately address issues of difference. After looking at the WSF as an unrepresentative body and the ways in which the organisation has attempted to deal with issues of difference, I will focus on how this has impacted upon the WSF's endeavour to be inclusive.

An Unrepresentative Organisation

Although the WSF has never actually surveyed its members to ascertain just who comprises the organisation, they have been always been aware that they do not represent a wide cross section of women:

> I don't think we've managed to find a way of really catering for diversity, in terms of who is active with the WSF. It is still largely white, professional, and if not single, then at least independent women who are prepared to give that kind of time.

For a number of years membership forms asked women to provide information about their skills and interests, revealing a trend that most WSF members work in a sport related field. The composition of the membership, and particularly the committee, has had implications for the way the WSF has tackled women's issues in sport.

Lenskyj (1991a) suggests the fact that many CAAWS members rely on the Canadian sports system for their employment has influenced the organisations's adoption of a liberal agenda. The WSF's move towards greater compatibility with the sports establishment during recent years has been aided by the professional background and contacts of key committee members in this area. It has also attracted more women from these professions into the WSF, and onto the committee. This has implications for women who do not have this

experience:

> I didn't have the skills really, I didn't have enough background in sport and I think that you do need to have that knowledge to be actively involved in the WSF. I had no idea what was going in the [professional] world of sport [administration]. The Sports Council was a total mystery to me. Mind you I think that is part of their ploy, you know, so nobody actually knows what they are doing. Including their staff.

With an organisational philosophy rooted in inclusiveness and with aspirations of providing a voice for women in sport, the inability of the WSF to attract a diverse membership has, not surprisingly, been a cause of some concern. This has been a recurrent theme, particularly with regards to the lack of Afro-Caribbean and Asian women on the committee:

> We were never ever successful in bringing many black women in, and we had one or two very interesting black women for a time, but I don't think there has ever been a strong black membership. Every year we said we were going to have a real push on race this year. And every year it didn't work, or didn't happen, or wasn't successful.

During its early years, one of the ways that the WSF tried to work on sports issues of concern to women of colour was through its contacts with women in the London based Afro-Caribbean Sports Association (ACSA). The pressures that women of colour face in campaigning to protect their particular interests include the experience of divided loyalties arising from identity politics. It is possible that ACSA was seen by black women as a more appropriate vehicle than the WSF for them to approach the issues of concern to them.

It is ironic that the only 'minority' group to have been well represented on the WSF committee have been an invisible minority. Lesbians have always been active on WSF committees, but the tensions around acknowledging their identity have suppressed any attempts at exploring issues specific to them. Lesbians have made a significant contribution to the WSF since its founding, but of all the various identities acknowledged they have been given the least recognition:

> Talking about the homophobia thing and lesbian issues, when you think about it, this organisation has not done a fucking thing for lesbians, it has never written about them in its whole entire history, apart from some women that used that used to be in it. There was a lesbian group in the early days. But the organisation has never done anything.

Despite the fact that the WSF has been concerned about being inclusive, there has been a notable absence of a clear policy framework to achieve a more representative membership. The most serious attempts at being inclusive occurred during the founding stages. The founding members took positive measures to draw as many different women into

their group; an open-door policy operated and women from minority groups were actively sought through different networks. The women involved in the organisation at this time were from more diverse backgrounds than in later years, a factor which drew attention to the differences between members. In addition to women holding diverse political views ranging from apolitical to radical lesbian feminist, issues of class, race and disability were the focus of discussion. This created more tension within committee meetings, but also enabled members to develop their awareness and understanding of other women's perspectives.

Before discussing the implications of the relationship between dealing with difference and being inclusive, a closer look is taken at how difference has been discussed within the WSF and the specific strategies the organisation has taken to address the issues.

Discussions and Strategies for Dealing with Difference

The tension between stressing commonality and acknowledging the needs of minority groups first surfaced in debates over how to word the WSF aims and objectives:

> It was proposed that we replace [discrimination on grounds of] "race, disability or sexuality" with "on any grounds whatsoever", the reason being that, apart from brevity, people could say we had left out other groups, such as age, religion, etc. This caused discussion with the view put forward that we should bring attention to minorities in all our literature.

The difficulty that the organisation has had in deciding which women to identify as having particular needs as a minority group has resulted in many members feeling that this is disruptive to the unity of the organisation:

> When you've established an organisation like this, there is no point in splintering off. You need to have one voice, which is what it is all about to me. You know, that all women are in there with one voice. We are not talking about the voice of disabled sports women, or lesbians, or business women, or elite sports women, you know we're all talking with *one* voice about women in sport. And all of us, all those groups are an integral part of that voice. To my way of thinking, no one group ever becomes more important than another.

When specific identities have been identified, there have been differing values attached to them. The acknowledgment of lesbians as a minority group deserving support, or even recognition, has been the source of major tension as previously discussed. As political issues more generally acknowledged in contemporary British society, class and race have been difficult for the WSF to ignore; these have been generally accepted as the basis for identifying minority groups. However this has not taken place without some degree of resistance. A member wrote to the WSF in response to the publicised statement that an ad hoc committee would be set up to prepare for the WSF's first AGM and that a number of

places on this group would be reserved for black women:

> I do not discriminate against any person on grounds of sex or colour. Nor have I allowed myself to organise any event, sporting or otherwise, that discriminates as such. But the blacks are not discriminated against in sport in the UK, they are allowed equal or unequal opportunities like the rest of the women. Women - period - are discriminated against regardless of colour, as far as the mass media or official sporting bodies go throughout the world. Blacks, Asians, foreigners, whites, etc (the list is endless) are all discriminated against because they are women...I want black people to stand up for themselves and not be given any easy entry into to positions of decision making because they are black. I believe they would be stronger for it, no-one can then falsely accuse them of gaining position because of their colour as opposed to their true abilities and talents.
> (WSF, Correspondence, 1985).

Coming from a white women who would not have been in a position to know about the realities of black women's lives, let alone speak on their behalf, these comments reveal a fairly common reluctance to comprehend the relative positions of privilege and oppression among women. A certain irony is apparent in the writer not being able to see how such arguments were constantly being used to prevent women from participating fully in sport and society.

It is significant that women with disabilities have been the minority group that the WSF has been most able to accommodate:

> I think there are three fundamental issues really for the WSF. These are issues that have never really been out in the open that much; we have talked about them a bit at AGMs. These are issues of race, sexual orientation and social class. We have only dabbled in them publicly, we have said, "We should do so and so, and yes we should..." but you know, nothing has happened. But we have all had the will to try and do it. Now the one issue that I think the WSF *has* dealt with very well has been disability. We have dealt with an issue that a lot of other organisations don't deal with. I do think that this is because it is a socially acceptable issue - it isn't those women's fault that they have a disability - whereas the other issues have all got political connotations.

The WSF was more active in exploring practical ways of dealing with difference during its early years. In its founding stages a special meeting was organised by a member with strong feminist convictions to explore how women hold power differently in an attempt to understand the effect of this on both organisational dynamics and women's issues in sport. Unfortunately, these discussions were an optional extra and took place outside the central committee meeting, suggesting that the issues were not seen as a priority. Other action in recognition of the needs of minority groups included holding workshops at the first AGM to explore issues of class and racism. The minutes record with disappointment that no-one attended the racism workshop (WSF, AGM Minutes, 1985). Developing a strategy on race was set as one of the WSF annual objectives for 1986. The WSF struggled

with this task. This was largely because it was committed to pursuing greater understanding of the issues from the perspective of Black and Asian women before it attempted such action and the organisation found this difficult to do on its scant contacts. Eventually it was decided to incorporate issues of race into the awareness training package being developed. The WSF established a mutually beneficial link with the British Sports Association for the Disabled in 1987. Through this important contact and the related long term committee membership of Monica Vaughan, an ex-international amputee swimmer, the WSF was able to contribute significantly to raising the profile of sportwomen with disabilities.

The most tangible product of the WSF's attention to difference has been the promotion of positive images of women in sport that represent women and girls of all ages and abilities and different ethnic groups. The WSF have attempted to raise the visibility of 'minority' groups of women through their newsletter and publicity material. The organisation have been leaders in the field in this work, to the extent that in 1989 the Sports Council was consulting the WSF on the presentation and selection of images of sportswomen for its own promotion and publicity material.

Although the work in promoting positive images has been sustained, as the WSF has evolved and the committee membership changed, the debates about understanding the needs of minority groups in order to serve them have faded away and the issues no longer appear on the WSF agenda:

> There was a lack of support for what some of us saw as a very necessary part of the organisation. There was this thing about, "Well we are all women so what's the problem?" You know, it was exactly what we are always telling other people not to do to us: don't treat women as a homogenous group, we are different groups of women. I think that had probably got lost. It was definitely there in the earlier days, but it definitely got lost, certainly in respect of black women.

With an increasingly homogenous WSF membership (and committee), dealing with difference has remained at the level of promoting positive images of a cross section of women being active. Although, the organisational literature continues to frame WSF activity in inclusive rhetoric, the organisation has never got beyond expressing its commitment to the issues. In this sense, while it would be unfair to call the WSF an exclusive organisation, it is difficult to see it as an inclusive organisation. This is because to be inclusive requires a proactive, rather than a passive stance.

The Impact of Dealing with Difference on "Reaching All Women"

The potential for the WSF to achieve its aim of involving a diversity of women lies in its ability to demonstrate to women from minority backgrounds a commitment to addressing their particular needs. In order for this to be taken seriously it has to go beyond extending an invitation to 'other' women to join the dominant group. Issues of ownership are at stake. Writing about this in relation to racism in the women's movement, bell hooks commented:

> One reason white women active in the feminist movement were unwilling to confront racism was their arrogant assumption that their call for sisterhood was a non-racist gesture. Many women have said to me, "We wanted black women and other non-white women to join the movement", totally unaware of their perception that they somehow 'own' the movement, that they are the 'hosts' inviting us as 'guests'.
> (1991, p.35)

The issue here is the positioning of 'others' in relation to the dominant group and the way this sets up particular power dynamics. Women who hold relative positions of power and social advantage are in a stronger position to subconsciously impose their interpretation of reality, and their ways of doing things, as the 'norm' against which women from different social backgrounds find themselves defined as other. 'Others' are welcomed through inclusive policies, but there is a taken for granted assumption that such a welcome is sufficient and they will be able to fit in with the prevailing culture. The lack of awareness about (and the reluctance to confront) their own position of privilege leads many women to stress the commonalities between women and to place a low priority on exploring the other dimensions of women's oppression, such as class, sexual-orientation and ethnic origin. Exploring these differences carries the danger of exposing the ways that women exploit each other, and dividing, rather than uniting, women.

Deconstructing how these dynamics function is the first important step in the process of including women in the WSF who face greater disadvantage because of their class, ethnicity, disability or sexuality. The limited analysis of power among women by WSF members has contributed to the organisation's inability to devise effective strategies to achieve greater representation, which ultimately impacts upon whose interests are served.

In much the same way as women find themselves excluded by the practices and interaction of male culture in organisational settings, (Hall, Cullen and Slack, 1989; Kanter, 1977) women can be marginalised when they do not fit in with the culture of a women's organisation that takes for granted the appropriateness of a particular structure and process.

Some of the women I interviewed were aware of the importance of examining how organisational practices systematically exclude certain groups:

> We tried very hard to include black women..she was almost exclusively silent in meetings and I found it impossible to penetrate this silence, to get to know her and be able to work closely with her. I asked her to chair a couple of meetings, talked her through agendas - I prepared all the agenda papers. I was trying to bring another, in particular a black woman, into that sort of role... Looking back, I should think it was an enormous problem. You know, she saw this arrogant, confident, white, middle-class woman telling her how to chair a meeting, or suggesting, you know these were the issues, here's the agenda, this is the briefing paper. I mean she just sort of used to sit and look at me and I couldn't comprehend this.

A commitment to inclusiveness means being open to changing the system rather than blaming particular groups for not fitting the system.

The organisational environment in which the WSF operates has made it difficult for it to achieve a diverse membership. With a focus on an external agenda that centres on influencing the sports establishment the WSF has had to conform to a certain organisational form to achieve acceptance - properly constituted etc. Despite efforts at incorporating a feminist process and a non-hierarchical structure, it has largely followed the male model of bureaucratic organisation. The organisational culture that has emerged from adopting this model alienates women who do not traditionally hold power and discourages their involvement. Because the WSF's work focusses on engagement with the system, the empowerment of members is an indirect, rather than a direct product of interaction with the organisations. This way of working favours women who already hold relative privilege among women - white, middle-class, professional women who posses confidence, the skills of bureaucratic organisations and knowledge of the sports system.

Chapter Eight

WOMEN, SPORT AND THE CHALLENGE OF POLITICS

The research 'findings' of this case-study have been presented as a chronological account of the WSF's historical development, together with discussion of key themes that relate to organisational issues. A common thread running through the text is the portrayal of sport as a site of political struggle and the implications of this for the WSF as a women's sport advocacy organisation. When providing a rationale for studying this particular organisational form, I argued that recognising the ideological power of sport enables connections to be made between women's activism in sport and their struggle against oppression in other areas of social life. In the descriptive chapters of the WSF's history, I demonstrated that there has been a gradual de-politicisation of the WSF's agenda over time, and suggested factors that have influenced this. The three themes discussed in the penultimate chapter focus directly on political issues which are relevant to the WSF as an organisation established to represent women's interests in sport.

My analysis of the WSF has drawn from feminist cultural analyses of sport which theorise sport as a cultural institution playing a fundamental role in the social production and reproduction of unequal gender relations. These theories demonstrate how ideologies of 'natural difference' present socially constructed meanings of masculinity and femininity as rooted in biology, and therefore immutable. Because sport is located in bodily practices, those who control it hold a great deal of cultural power in defining social values around what it means to be male and what it means to be female. It is not just a coincidence that the interests of those who rule sport (and society) are served by the maintenance of ideologies of natural difference. Exploring the implications of power in sport as a shaper of social relations also raises questions about power dynamics between women, as well as between men and women. This draws attention to the relative privilege held by different women and the impact of this upon challenging women's disadvantaged position in sport.

The development of the WSF holds a special place in the unfolding history of British women's attempts at finding their own space within the world of sport. The emergence of the WSF also represents a unique opportunity for women to take collective action through a focus on sport to achieve social change more widely. The potential of this opportunity begins with recognising how sport and physical activity can help to empower women and help them to take back control of their lives:

> ...patriarchy keeps us in our place ultimately through physical strength and maintains this ideology by telling us we are weak. (Pearson, 1991, p.1)

The importance of women's engagement with sport goes beyond the possibilities of increasing individual women's physical strength and confidence, towards an analysis of how specific practices associated with sport contribute to men's social power over women. Radical feminist theories that uncover oppressive processes at work in sport, and more widely in the politics of the body, have made an enormous contribution to our understanding of the significance of women pursuing cultural struggles in these areas.

The theoretical ground being broken by radical feminist analyses of sport is relatively new terrain however, and as yet, there has been little translation of these ideas into strategies that can be employed by women working together in a practical way to effect change. The distance that currently exists between theory and practice in this area is a potential problem, but not an insurmountable one. It has been suggested that the potential for exploring the vital connections between theory and practice rests with women's sports advocacy organisations (Hall, 1993, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994).

The concluding thoughts on the WSF that follow do not attempt to provide definitive answers to questions about how a political agenda might be pursued by the organisation. There are two reasons for this. First, such a complex and challenging task warrants more attention than the scope of this research could possibly provide. Secondly, the task requires a collective and interactive process rather than 'solutions' being offered by my presuming a position of authority as a researcher with 'higher' knowledge. Such an approach would seriously conflict with the feminist principles that I have endeavoured to use as a guide in my research project. On the contrary, my intention has been to make a contribution to the debates, or perhaps more specifically, to contribute to the task of politicising the debates about women and sport in the first place. With this in mind, I shall return briefly to the three themes of the previous chapter to explain why I believe it is essential that these 'political' issues be addressed by the Women's Sport Foundation.

Acknowledging Feminist Goals

The undeniable connection between the WSF and feminism rests upon a commonality of goals at the most basic level; the recognition that women are disadvantaged because of their gender and the commitment to working for changes that will benefit

women. The importance of the WSF acknowledging this cannot be underestimated. Regardless of the shifting influence of radical and liberal feminist approaches to advocating on behalf of women in sport in different eras, the complete suppression of a feminist identity is a dangerous move for the organisation. I feel there are many reasons why this is so, and suggest a few examples.

The reluctance to explore women's issues in sport with reference to any dimensions of the feminist spectrum denies women within the organisation the possibility of developing any level of feminist consciousness. Without this, it is very difficult to comprehend women's gender inequalities in sport as a problem that needs to be challenged at all. Many women join the organisation because they are concerned about unfair practices that reduce women's opportunities, or because they would like to see more women benefit from taking part in physical recreation. Unless it is clear that the WSF exists because women (and now men) wish to work together to challenge sexism in sport, the organisation has no purpose - the existing structures may as well continue to deliver the same male-oriented opportunities without the WSF.

Without a feminist analysis, the ownership of sport by men and the promotion of male interests through sport are easily protected as 'natural', and therefore perfectly acceptable. The starting point of a feminist analysis is that male privilege is neither natural, nor justifiable, and that women have to take action *for themselves* to rectify this. The WSF was founded on these principles, but it seems to be drifting increasingly away from them. Concern for the implications of this leads one to ask the question: at what stage does the WSF break completely free from its philosophical origins, and when it reaches this point, what is there to distinguish its work from that of say, the Sports Council? At worst, the departure from a self-conscious feminist philosophy may in the long run bring about the demise of the WSF; at best it will ensure its assimilation by the sports establishment that it was set up to change.

An issue that has been at the heart of the debates over the organisation's women-only structure is the degree to which women themselves are setting the agenda and driving the WSF's attempts to achieve change. Without becoming ensnared in essentialist assumptions about women having some biologically derived ability to see the issues differently from men (this also runs foul of tendencies to universalise women), there is nevertheless a political significance in women running their own sports advocacy

organisation on their own terms. The commitment to women's empowerment and autonomy as an outcome of feminist practice is significant here.

Women taking action for themselves does not necessarily preclude men from being involved in the process of change, a concern shared by numerous women in the WSF who are reluctant to embrace a feminist identity. In fact, the point has frequently been made by those who argue for a radical feminist analysis of sport, that 'gender' issues are not just women's issues, but men's issues as well (there being two genders),and that men have to change as well as women in the struggle against social inequality (Hall, 1990; Hargreaves, 1994; Kidd, 1990). The critical issue remains from whose standpoint the analysis of the issues is made. Feminist commitment to women's autonomy seriously questions how far men are able to deconstruct their own position of privilege, built as it is on taken for granted assumptions about male as the norm and female, the 'other', defined only in relation to this norm. The reluctance of women within the WSF to engage with feminism forecloses the possibilities of the organisation contributing to women achieving autonomy.

There is a crucial relationship between women's ownership of the process of change, and the *degree* to which there will be a shift in the gendered balance of power. The differences between a liberal and radical feminist approach are highlighted by this issue. The liberal acceptance of the status quo with a focus on including more women without fundamentally altering the structures contrast with radical feminist attempts at redefining the terms of the struggle. As suggested in my discussion of the ideological power of sport in chapter one, the only way that the hegemonic power of white male privilege can be undermined is for women:

> ...to offer much more strongly their own version of sports reality which undercuts altogether the issue of male supremacy and the standards which measure it.
> (Willis, 1982, p.44).

Sport may become more open to women, but the fact that it remains a male defined cultural institution will in itself discourage many women from seeing it as relevant to their lives.

The importance of WSF members exploring the connections between the work of the organisation and feminism has been discussed so far purely in terms of the organisation's contribution to sport. In light of the historic absence of sport from the priorities of the women's movement, sports advocacy organisations such as the WSF might well provide a catalyst for putting women's sports issues on the wider agenda of women's political concerns. The ideology of male supremacy asserts itself in all social relations and

resisting this in sport has important implications for other areas of women's lives. As previously noted, women's activism focussing on sport as a site of ideological struggle has been limited. At a grass roots level there are groups in Britain which have developed their own women-centred alternative sporting practices that make a point of addressing political issues of difference and sexuality (see Hargreaves, 1994, p.251). The empowerment of individual women is the foundation of the feminist claim that the personal is the political, but collective action on a national scale is also needed in order to give these issues a more public airing, and to challenge social attitudes that uphold the patriarchal status quo.

Confronting Homophobia

Viewing sport as a site of ideological conflict includes taking account of struggles for legitimacy between dominant and subordinate sexual identities, as well as struggles over gender inequality. These issues are closely interconnected. Understanding why it is important for the WSF to engage with the politics of sexuality requires a closer look at why this subject is such an issue in sport.

Despite women's increasing inroads into sport, it continues to serve as an important social institution where boys learn the script of masculinity. Success in sport for boys and men translates as success at being male and is rewarded with social status and a reaffirmation of gender identity. On the other hand, considerable censure and hostility is often meted out to women who attempt to gain access to areas of sport claimed by the men as their exclusive preserve. These are also unsafe place for gay men to be open about their sexuality. The myth of the natural superiority of a dominant masculinity is exposed for what it is when the boundaries are invaded by those of the wrong gender or sexuality. The response to female invasions is often to project the fears of those under threat onto the intruder - the woman's sexuality comes under question. The inference is that to be good at (or even want to participate in) what is 'by nature' a masculine activity, renders the offender an inadequate woman. This logic easily develops from a sexist framework into a homophobic one - the transgressor is not only dysfunctional as a woman, but by default must be a man-hating lesbian. The fear of being labelled a lesbian (whether the label is true or not) is used as a powerful control mechanism to keep women within the boundaries of a particular definition of femininity.

Homophobia relies on a powerful self-maintaining dynamic; the fear of repercussions

is sufficient to maintain silence around the subject and this effectively prevents it from being confronted, deconstructed and challenged. Insinuation is frequently enough to create the required taint of doubt about a woman's 'normality', the ensuing loss of credibility can be damaging even while it remains invisible. The force of homophobia within the WSF, as elsewhere in sport, makes the politics of sexuality a difficult subject for both heterosexual women and lesbians to address. Attitudes within the WSF about acknowledging lesbians vary considerably. A few brave individuals have attempted to make lesbians and their needs visible, others have resented this and insist that sexuality is a private, not a public issue. Other women with a comprehension of the issues support strategic choices that prioritise the protection of the organisation's image over the needs of one group of women.

Discrimination against lesbians in sport, whether against coaches, officials or players thrives on silence. Breaking this chain begins with shattering the silence. Without wishing to minimise the risks involved for the WSF in being part of this process, the organisation should take courage from the fact that there are other women in sport who are attempting to tackle the politics of sexuality and who are increasingly bringing issues of homophobia out into the open. These attempts have of course met with resistance, but they are crucial as the first important steps in making the issues visible. The point is that there is enormous cumulative value to be accrued from linking these different initiatives in order to increase the legitimacy of sexual politics as an issue in sport. As the British women's sport advocacy organisation, the WSF should be looking at strategic ways of influencing the debates about women and sport to include issues of sexuality.

Attempts currently under way to put sexuality on the agenda come in many forms: individuals making political stands; women working collectively to promote alternative grass roots initiatives and opportunities for lesbian sport; women in academia providing a theoretical analysis of the issues. Of particular significance for the WSF's position, is the appearance of homophobia on the agenda of public forums focussing on sports issues. In May 1994, "Women, Sport, and the Challenge of Change", an international conference supported by the Sports Council and the International Olympic Committee organised an issues workshop entitled, "Challenging Homophobia in Sport". The symbolic significance of this should not be overlooked. The opportunity to follow up the opening provided at this high profile conference awaits the WSF, all that is needed is the political will to do so.

Creating opportunities for women to meet together in a mutually supportive

environment to discuss homophobia, to understand and share the issues, has been an approach pursued by with varying degrees of success by other sports advocacy organisations (Hall, 1994). The process of discussing the issues does not preclude careful strategising by the WSF to steer through homophobia in the sports establishment. Simply keeping quiet about the politics of sexuality and removing all references to lesbian visibility from organisational literature does not prevent the organisation, or women in it, from being labelled as lesbian. What it does do is to reinforce the power of homophobia by adding another link of silence to the chain.

The Relevance of a Politics of Difference for the WSF

The reluctance of WSF members to explore the relationship between community and difference, and to examine power and privilege among women, presents a major obstacle in the organisation's pursuit of its goals. Part of the hesitation in fully addressing differences among women in the WSF is based on the perception that to forefront differences between women undermines the unity of the organisation. In addition it raises questions about the relevance of having an organisation acting as *the* voice of women in sport. Fear of fragmentation resulting from organising around specific identities, rather than 'women' has been an underlying concern of WSF members. The strategic need to commit to a common cause to justify its existence has kept issues of difference off the WSF agenda. WSF members have recognised the impossibility of trying to be all things to all women in sport, but have stopped short, not surprisingly, of questioning the validity of the 'common cause'.

There is a circular dynamic to this as the membership and leadership becomes increasingly similar in its social, professional and political make up. Regardless of its desire to be a more representative body, the narrowing of the organisational culture continues to discourage women who are not white, middle-class, sports professionals from seeing the WSF as relevant to them. Without women from more diverse backgrounds involved in the WSF, the committee is unable to fully comprehend the issues of minority groups, let alone take action on their behalf. This increases the tendency of the WSF agenda to reflect the interests of a limited cross section of women which further discourages some women from seeing the organisation as serving their needs. The uncritical acceptance of a common cause for women in sport translates working to improve opportunities for the common good into working to improve opportunities for the dominant group.

Critically engaging with the principles and concepts upon which the WSF is founded is not necessarily the same as deconstructing these ideas out of existence, it is about producing more complex understandings in order to make better strategic choices. It is also about developing political awareness. Subjecting taken for granted assumptions to scrutiny and reflexivity can be both painful and productive; WSF founding members experienced this when their debates incorporated varied (and often conflicting) positions.

The WSF statement of intent to work on behalf of all women and its acknowledgement that some women face particular disadvantage in sport, is an important first step, beyond which the organisation has not moved, uncertain in which direction to proceed. Taking the politics of difference seriously would undoubtedly shift the organisation onto new ground. This would involve acknowledging and working through issues of difference *in order* to identify common ground, rather than assuming an existing shared cause. It would also mean being prepared to take risks, as other women struggling to achieve political progress for women have done, but with some regard for how dealing with differences has helped or hindered progress elsewhere.

Identity politics and the politics of difference have been central themes of the women's movement in Britain since the 1980s as women began to realise that their differences separated them more than their commonalities united them (Lovenduski and Randall, 1993). The affirmation of specific political identities in rejection of universalising claims by feminism and the accompanying debates emerging from a politics of difference have often been acrimonious and have been seen as highly disruptive to the project of feminism. Although they have been divisive, addressing these issues have also been fundamental to the growth of women's organisations (Leidner, 1991). The risks involved with engaging with politics of difference are not to be underestimated. Working from the starting point of difference towards commonality recognises the multiple identities of women and the way this creates very different experiences of disadvantage. It also draws attention to the reality that collective endeavour is not necessarily a safe place for all women, and that for some, working together for a common cause is "doing coalition as a means of survival" (Johnson, 1983).

Arguing the relevance of a politics of difference to sport brings the discussion back to the feminist analysis of sport as a cultural institution where relations of power are produced and reproduced. This includes taking account of how practices and cultural values

embodied in sport create and maintain hierarchies of not only gender, but race, class and sexuality as well. Women cannot use sport as a site of resistance to male oppression without also taking on board issues of women's oppression of each other (i.e., homophobia) and how the failure to challenge these issues contributes to the maintenance of men's power over women.

A women's sport advocacy organisation will not effectively serve the interests of 'women' without first attempting to unpack the implications of difference and without examining the connections between the hierarchies served by sport. I believe that it is possible to find a balance between the need to acknowledge oppressed identities and the need to organise collectively to achieve gains for women in and through sport, as in other areas of social life.

In the relatively short period of time that it has been in existence, the WSF has made an important contribution to improving opportunities in sport for women. It has achieved this despite struggling as a voluntary organisation against material limitations, and while having to confront various internal and external conflicts. The WSF's achievements over the years have been driven by the determination of various women who have committed enormous energy and great resourcefulness in pursuit of the WSF's goals. As a volunteer with the WSF I felt empowered by the experience of working with other women in such an atmosphere to achieve change, and by the beginnings of a feminist consciousness that accompanied this. It was through the WSF that I first began to make connections between my personal experiences in sport and wider political issues. The process of researching the organisation for my masters degree has taken me considerably further along this road. Like all the women I interviewed for the research, I believe that a great deal remains to be done for women in sport and that the WSF has an important future role in this. The WSF's future potential for achieving change for women in sport and society rests with its ability to engage with the challenge of politics.

NOTES

1. Ann Hall's (1994) comparative research on women's sport advocacy organisations has been a useful source in identifying the range of organisations of this type that have been established around the world.

2. In addition to the research discussed, Scott-Pawson (1991) undertook an organisational case analysis of CAAWS as a feminist organisation. Because I have not been able to locate this work, I have been unable to comment more fully on its contribution to this area of research.

3. The following discussions refer generally to the women who were directly involved in the running of the WSF as WSF members; other members are identified as the wider membership.

4. There is a technical exception to this because one woman I interviewed was on long term sick leave from work at the time I interviewed her. However, she was a professional in the sense that she would have been in full time employment if it hadn't been for her illness.

5. The target for indoor sports was almost reached by 1987, but women's participation in outdoor sports fell during the period. The revised targets for the remainder of the decade aimed at increasing women's indoor participation by 70 per cent and their outdoor participation by 35 per cent.

6. Changes in the physical education profession during the 1960s and 1970s included schools becoming co-educational and a push by the profession to improve their status. Men were increasingly employed to teach in the women's colleges and women physical educationalists found themselves forced out of their women-only world by the need for the external validation of their courses. The merger of the separate spheres left women at a disadvantage as they entered a world where their interests were no longer centre stage and the influence of men was well established. The drive to raise the status of the profession culminated in the introduction of degree status for physical education training and the opening up of career opportunities within the profession. Women found themselves increasingly relegated to the lower levels of the developing profession where they had once been in control of their own profession. The irony of this is appreciated when considering that:

> the successful formulation of physical education as a school subject, and the building of the institutional complex which sustained it, was a remarkable achievement, and one for which women were wholly responsible. (Fletcher, 1984, p.155)

7. Like the WSF, the Islington and Liverpool projects were able to attract joint funding from their regional Sports Councils and local authorities. The Liverpool Women & Sport Group is particularly interesting because it appears to represent a local manifestation of the WSF in terms of its philosophy and it seems to have had a very similar pattern of development. Surprisingly, there does not appear to have been much contact between the two groups.

8. The abolition of the Labour controlled Metropolitan councils in the first wave of local government reforms severely disrupted public and voluntary sector work in these areas. For example, the staunchly socialist GLC (Greater London Council) had been highly significant in creating an environment in which the needs of groups who have been traditionally ignored in British politics were being met. Numerous women's projects were funded through the GLC Women's Committee Support Unit providing unprecedented support and visibility for the needs of women of colour, lesbians and single-parent mothers. Some of this work both directly and indirectly improved women's access to leisure and physical recreation. The WSF had close contact with the GLC Women's Unit until it disappeared with the demise of the GLC.

9. The introduction of CCT into local government provision of leisure services required local authorities to draw up a detailed contract for the management of their recreation facilities and services. Local councils could themselves bid to retain service provision in-house, but the contract was awarded to the most competitive tender. A private contractor's interest was obviously in maximising profit within the conditions of the contract; concerns about leisure policy or political commitment to equal opportunities were the responsibility of the council drawing up the terms of agreement. Unless the authority specifically laid down provision that protected the interests of disadvantaged groups, the operation of services to generate maximum income favoured those who could afford to pay. Safeguarding access to recreation for particular groups meant that an authority had to be prepared to engage in cross subsidisation within their leisure contract. There was a great deal of criticism of this legislation within the recreation profession. The idea of sport and leisure provision being guided by market forces rather than social policy was unacceptable to those committed to making sport widely accessible within their community.

   See Henry, I.P. (1993) The Politics of Leisure Policy, ch.4 and 5 for a full discussion of the impact of CCT on local government, its response and reaction against CCT, and the significance of this for leisure policy.

10. The WSF minutes of July 1987 recorded:

> J, who runs the women's Pole Vault, Triple-Jump and Hammer Club had written to thank us for including her club in the newsletter, but had complained about our notice for the Lesbians In Sport Group. X had replied that we existed to promote sport for all women. X to write again stressing this point.

11. The London Borough Grants Scheme was established in 1986 when the Greater London Council was abolished, dividing local government in the Greater London area into thirty-three separate Borough Councils. The unit's purpose was to provide financial support for projects that spanned a number of the London Boroughs.

12. It is difficult to assess patterns of membership or to even to analyze who belonged to the organisation because records are very patchy. The WSF committees were conscious that they knew little about their membership and attempted to collect information on the WSF application form. The main problem was someone having the time to consistently collate the information and produce statistics. Dealing with membership applications and chasing up renewals was a time consuming job in itself and was only kept on top of when the WSF employed someone to do it. By extracting references to membership numbers from all the

documentation I collected I have put together a general picture of the WSF membership levels over the years. One thing is quite apparent; it was a major task getting women to renew their subscriptions and often the 'membership list' was carrying a very large proportion of unpaid subscribers. In July 1988 the newsletter published a full list of the membership. An analysis of this reveals that at this time only 37% of the membership list of 428 had paid their dues. Of the 161 paid memberships, 15 were organisations, 56 were unwaged (includes students) and 90 were waged individuals.

13. Fearing that the WSF might not survive its latest crisis, the hard-core of WSF committee rallied round to ensure that there would be sufficient members for a full 1989 committee. A wide range of women were contacted through various personal networks; previous committee members were asked to return and new women felt to be sympathetic to the WSF cause were approached. Anita White brought young blood into the organisation by encouraging a number of students from the college she lectured at (WSIHE) to take on a committee role.

14. Barry Houlihan describes the composition of the CCPR as:

> currently represent[ing] a wide variety of British sports and recreation organisations, including the governing bodies, a broad range of umbrella organisations (such as the British Universities' Sports Federation and the British Sports Association for the Disabled), professional bodies (Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management), youth, teaching and medical organisations. It is therefore with a high degree of legitimacy that it claims to be the 'voice of British sport'. (1991, p.103)

15. The seminar used the term 'leadership' in a generic sense to encompass all areas of sport where decisions are made and individuals have influence. Five areas of leadership were considered: coaching and officiating, voluntary positions, paid employment, physical/sport education and research and the sports media (ESC Women in Sport Working Group, 1989).

16. A letter from the WSF chair was published in the Times, drawing attention to their lamentable coverage of women's sport (White, 1990). This generated a very negative response from a male reader (Park, 1990). The WSF still challenged the Sports Council on occasions, although it is significant that as the partnership developed the WSF were less inclined to do this. In November 1988 the WSF wrote to criticize Sports Council recruitment practices following the appointment of a white male as regional officer with responsibility for women and ethnic minorities (WSF correspondence: 1988). Nearly a year later the committee recorded the following comment:

> £6,000 has not yet been paid by the Sports Council for work done. It was felt unfortunate that a letter could not be written criticising the Sport Council's actions, because of repercussions! (WSF Minutes: September 1989)

17. The scheme was based on inviting facility managers to complete a checklist of ten criteria relating to women's particular needs (e.g. creche provision, women-only sessions, pram-parking, well lit access) and explain in 100 words why they were women-friendly. Centres fulfilling the requirements were awarded certificates and 'WSF Approved Women-Friendly stickers" and given local publicity.

18. In 1989 the London Council for Sport and Recreation set up a working group to formulate a policy that addressed Black and ethnic minority participation in sport. The group published a report and a set of recommendations aimed at a wide range of organisations. The WSF noted the document and publicised it in its June newsletter. The WINNERS Forum (Women sport and recreation professionals from London Boroughs) held a meeting that focussed on issues relating to lesbians in sport. A number of non-borough representatives were invited, including the WSF London worker, the Sports Council and a journalist.

19. The attendance of these two members at the conference was linked to their professional interests, Celia Brackenridge as a sports academic and Eileen Langsley as a professional photographer. The WSF was never in a financial position to send official delegations to important conferences, but relied on its members wearing a 'WSF hat' when undertaking professional activities that had relevance to the organisation's work.

20. The investment by Tambrands totalling £ 250,000 was roughly broken down as follows:

Awards to young women	50,000
Women & Sport magazine	50,000
Awards Ceremony	25,000
Scheme administration (WSF)	25,000
PR company fee	100,000

21. During the sponsorship negotiations Eileen Langsley was invited to a meeting at the Tambrands European headquarters to discuss ways in which the WSF might assist with the company's plans to expand its European market. Although the WSF was a small organisation, the potential of its networks were considerable, such as contacts within the European Sports Conference Women and Sport Working Group.

22. The WSF Award scheme administrator's role included the distribution of Award Information packs at various major events (e.g. English Schools Athletics Championships), dealing with enquiries, and liaison between the WSF, Tambrands and DSA (the PR company) for the organisation of the Awards ceremony (sports personalities as guests and judges). She was also contracted to serve as editor of the Women and Sport magazine.

23. The early national development work undertaken by Dusty Rhodes through Sports Council special project funding had been successfully completed in July 1992. The WSF retained its office at the London Women's Centre and kept the basic administrative work of the organisation going with a part-time worker.

24. This statement needs to be qualified by noting that a number of the women who have served on the WSF committee over the last five years do identify as feminists and many are sensitive to the impact of race, class, sexuality and disability on women's experience in sport. These women have maintained their involvement because of a commitment to ensuring the survival of the WSF and they believe in playing a strategic game with the system to do so. The rules of the game discourage public (e.g., organisational) associations with 'feminism' or 'politics' that may be uncomfortable for others to confront.

25. The relationship between the USA WSF and the UK WSF touched a nerve recently when the British organisation received a polite, but pointed, letter about the use of the name "Women's Sports Foundation", to which the USA WSF laid exclusive claim. (WSF, Correspondence, March 1994) Concerned about the (financial) implications of other organisations using its name, the American WSF had taken legal advice and suggested the terms on which they would be happy for the UK WSF to continue using their name. This basically amounted to the British organisation being granted a license for a nominal fee (£20) and giving assurances that they would continue with suitable efforts to promote and encourage women's sport. Despite the friendly tone of the letter the British women were not pleased. They saw the move as an unnecessary attempt by the USA WSF to protect their own interests, accompanied by an inappropriate flexing of muscle. Aware that the Japanese WSF had capitulated to pressure by the Americans, the British had no intention of following suit. Anxious to remain on good terms, discussions were held and the matter concluded by agreeing to maintain close communications to ensure that no conflicts arose over activities pursued under the name of Women's Sports Foundation. The British continue to use the title WSF.

26. The most obvious example in the USA of feminist sports activism utilising a liberal approach is the campaign for women's equality in sport that led to the passage of the Title IX legislation. The Canadian women's sport advocacy organisation, CAAWS, has specifically stated its feminist orientation (until very recently). Although influenced by radical feminist members, this organisation has always pursued a liberal feminist agenda.

27. The Conservative government's attempt to regulate sexuality through the introduction of the 'Clause 28' legislation in May 1988 met with widespread public protest. The legislation effectively prohibited local authorities from engaging in activities that promoted homosexuality. One of the more dramatic forms of protest took place in January 1988. Two women created an uproar by abseiling from the public gallery into the centre of Parliamentary proceedings during Prime Minister's question time. As was intended, this protest gained a great deal of media attention and was used symbolically in subsequent anti-Clause 28 publicity material. The cover of the WSF newsletter portrayed a cartoon image of the protest.

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APPENDIX I

BRITISH WOMEN'S SPORTS FOUNDATION

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

AIM

To promote the interests of all women in and through sport, and to gain equal opportunities and options for women.

OBJECTIVES

1. To involve women from all walks of life and with as many and varied opinions as possible in a network to facilitate the achievement of the group's aim. There will be no discrimination whatsoever on the grounds of race, disability or sexuality and special consideration will be given to women who face particular difficulties.

2. To serve as a source of information for this women's sporting world, with a register of all groups and individuals who take part and are interested in women's sport.

3. To liaise with relevant agencies in sport for information and advice and with appropriate commercial and public organisations for financial support and publicity.

4. To develop and distribute promotional and informative literature and establish a library/research centre for women's sporting achievements and interests.

5. To promote and support research into the factors which affect women's participation in sport.

6. To establish a charter identifying the rights of women in sport and lobby for changes in legislation to make provision for women's needs in sport.

7. To identfy and monitor discrimination against women in sport and to respond appropriately.

8. To lobby for changes in school and tertiary curricula towards equal opportunities in sport and physical education.

9. To support courses, conferences and research on women and sport, and promote women's training in the fields of sports performance, media, coaching, refereeing and administration.

10. To encourage increased and unbiassed coverage of women's sport in the media.

11. To establish links with sister organisations in other countries to discuss areas of common interest.

October 1984